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New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Vassilenko
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rivas

Agenda

Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kurz.

Mr. Kurz: It is an honour to address the Security Council today in my role as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Allow me to express my condolences on the passing away of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation.

With 57 participating States, the OSCE is the largest regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. For decades, the OSCE has been an important partner of the United Nations. As members can imagine, chairing the OSCE is not an easy job. Like at the United Nations, there are many different interests and opinions that often make it hard to find consensus and to achieve progress on the challenges that we face. But even if it is sometimes hard, there is no alternative to multilateral cooperation. It is the only way to achieve peace, security and stability.

Austria has taken over the OSCE chairmanship at a critical moment. Everywhere we look, there are grave threats to peace and security: war and destruction in places like Syria and eastern Ukraine; serious violations of international law and signs of increasing nationalism; and radicalization and terrorism within our societies. The consequences are the rising anxiety of the people and increasing mistrust among States.

Given these challenges, our chairmanship will focus on the following priorities. First, we want to contribute to defusing existing conflicts. Secondly, we will create a platform to assist States in their efforts to combat radicalization and violent extremism. Thirdly, we will do what we can to help rebuild trust and confidence among the participating States of the OSCE.

Armed conflicts have caused much suffering, displacement and destruction in parts of the OSCE area. There can be no military solutions to these conflicts. We have to find ways to enable political solutions. One of the central issues the OSCE deals with is the crisis in and around Ukraine. This crisis — the annexation of Crimea, the flow of arms into the Donbas, the role of the Russian Federation, the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and the repeated acts of violence — is regularly discussed in the OSCE, just as it is in the United Nations.

During my first visit to eastern Ukraine in January, I saw the unacceptable situation of civilians there. We must improve the living conditions of the local population, especially along the contact line. To that end, access for humanitarian organizations is crucial. The level of violence that we saw a few weeks ago is unacceptable. It remains vital that all sides fully implement the Minsk agreements and strictly respect the ceasefire to which they have repeatedly committed themselves. The OSCE, with its Trilateral Contact Group, demonstrated its crucial role in brokering the ceasefire.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has prevented a worsening of the situation through its monitoring and reporting and facilitated the repair of critical infrastructure, such as electricity and water supply. We now have to support the Special Monitoring Mission in fully carrying out its mandate. We want to increase the number of monitors on the ground, improve the technical equipment for monitoring, and extend the operating hours along the contact line. We will continue working to make concrete steps towards full the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Forces must disengage and heavy weapons must be withdrawn. As Chairperson-in-Office, we will assist all efforts to achieve progress on the other conflict situations in the OSCE area, in particular regarding the Transnistrian settlement process, the conflict in Georgia and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh.

Besides classic conflicts, one other major challenge to security is radicalization and terrorism. Both threaten the internal stability of States, the rule of law and our basic freedoms, such as freedom of expression

and the freedom of religion or belief. More than 10,000 people from the OSCE area have joined Da'esh in order to rape and kill in its name in Syria, Iraq and Libya. These fighters not only cause terrible suffering in those countries, but they also pose a threat to the security of the OSCE countries when they return. In the OSCE region, there are different dynamics for radicalization, but what we have in common is that the most vulnerable group to be radicalized is young people.

To better understand these dynamics and identify ways to effectively address the root causes and triggers of radicalization, I have appointed Mr. Peter Neumann as my Special Representative on Radicalization. He will look for best practices, share them with participating States and make concrete recommendations on how to improve the fight against radicalization and violent extremism. If terrorists cooperate globally, States must do the same in order to fight terrorism more effectively.

No matter whether we want to solve conflicts or fight against terrorism, what is always needed as a basis for international cooperation is trust. Rebuilding trust among States in the OSCE area is probably the most difficult task. As a neutral country, Austria has always been a bridge-builder between the East and the West and a good place for dialogue. As OSCE Chair, Austria will strive to foster open and constructive dialogue as a basis for finding common solutions to the challenges facing the OSCE. In the OSCE, security concerns are often at the core of mistrust. Therefore, the Austrian chairmanship will also try to resume discussions on conventional arms control in Europe. That is in the interests of every single participating State.

In line with the mandate we received at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg, Austria will seek to launch a structured dialogue on current and future challenges to security in the OSCE area. Cybersecurity and social and economic cooperation — two issues that we discussed in Vienna recently — are areas where everybody stands to gain from more cooperation. Success in these areas will lead to more trust. The same is true for human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Together, we can strengthen the cohesiveness and resilience of our societies to better counter threats to our security. I welcome the establishment of the United Nations Liaison Office in Vienna. It will enable even stronger cooperation between the OSCE and the United Nations. We both will benefit from more information exchange, operational coordination and technical suppor,t especially in the field.

I hope that with these priorities, the OSCE and Austria as its Chair can make a contribution to strengthening a rules-based global order and to advancing the goals, values and principles of the United Nations.

The President: I thank Mr. Kurz for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria, Mr. Kurz, for his comprehensive briefing.

We should like to see growing cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations, especially its Chapter VIII. Such cooperation must be regular and multifaceted, encompassing all dimensions of security. The OSCE is designed to assist United Nations mechanisms in the area of their purview within the framework of its mandate. It is important to take into account the comparative advantages of the two organizations and to avoid duplication and the waste of resources. We should like to see constructive cooperation with the Austrian chairmanship of the OSCE and we share its key priorities, aimed at conflict resolution, combatting radicalization and extremism, the restoration of trust among States, and the strengthening of the institutional foundation of the Organization.

The OSCE must strive to carry out those functions for which it was created, serving as a platform for equitable dialogue and collective decision-making on security issues. Its focus should be on the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and cyberthreats; the harmonization of integration processes; support for traditional values and the protection of the rights of national minorities; combatting neo-Nazism; reform of the OSCE, including the development of its charter; and the organization of the electoral monitoring work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. We are ready to contribute to that.

We see the greatest potential in combating transnational threats, particularly in the context of the

immigration crisis, the fight against human trafficking, xenophobia and discrimination, and especially in the protection of the rights of national, religious and linguistic minorities.

We have noted the evolution of the cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, with major collaboration between the OSCE secretariat's Transnational Threats Department and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in combating trafficking in drugs and small arms, terrorism, organized crime, corruption and money-laundering, as well as in the areas of combating human trafficking and illegal migration. The OSCE's Ministerial Council meetings in Basel in 2014 and Belgrade in 2015 adopted declarations on the issue of cooperation between the two organizations, strengthening the OSCE's role in implementing important United Nations decisions, in particular the Security Council's anti-terrorism resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014), 2199 (2015) and 2249 (2015). Last summer in Kaliningrad, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, organized a seminar for OSCE participating States' focal points on implementing resolution 1540 (2004).

In the area of international security information, the OSCE complements the global United Nations efforts to develop confidence-building measures through the use of information and communications technologies. However, there have also been alarming attempts to introduce monitoring mechanisms similar to those of the United Nations into OSCE practices, as well as non-consensus documents of the General Assembly and Human Rights Council. We take a generally positive view of cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE in the field, for example, through the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. We appreciate their collaboration in the Geneva talks on Transcaucasia, which have been an important factor in establishing direct dialogue between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We support the Austrian chairship for its backing of the OSCE's continuing efforts to help settle regional conflicts, and we are willing to cooperate in reaching settlements in Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh.

It is to be hoped that 2017 can bring peace and a political solution in eastern Ukraine, where the armed conflict, which has now lasted more than three years, continues to take new civilian lives. The residents of Donetsk and Luhansk have suffered for their right to freedom and special status within the Ukrainian State. It is vital that full compliance with the Minsk package of measures be finally achieved if we are to grant the region and its inhabitants the possibility of a peaceful life and democratic self-government and to restore their broken economic ties to the rest of Ukraine. All of that is provided for in the Minsk agreement, as adopted in resolution 2202 (2015).

In that regard, we believe that we have a proven and well-established model for settling the conflict in south-eastern Ukraine, one element of which is the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. We do not see any practical benefits of duplicating the functions of the Special Monitoring Mission through any new types of international structure. We hope that the Austrian chairmanship will continue to keep the Mission's objectivity under control, while giving direction to its representatives in the Trilateral Contact Group and its subgroups on developing a direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict.

While the OSCE has sufficient resources in the area of conflict resolution, it is important to act extremely cautiously in this sensitive and delicate process and to bear in mind three key principles — that conflicts must be resolved peacefully, with the direct participation of the parties and respect for their interests, and within existing formats.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Russia considers the OSCE to be an important mechanism for building a fair and indivisible security system for Europe as a whole, and is involved in strengthening its role and authority. We believe firmly that in order to improve the OSCE's relevance it is essential to clearly define the priorities for its activities and to create a charter for the organization.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I would like to welcome Foreign Minister Kurz to the Security Council and thank him for his briefing today. His chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), together with Austria's hosting of the OSCE, as well as parts of the United Nations, shows just how central his country is to international cooperation and the rule-based system.

Sadly, as we heard here yesterday (see S/PV.7886), the rule-based system is under threat. It is a threat that we talk about often in this Chamber, but to the residents of cities such as Marinka, in Ukraine, that threat is a horrifying daily reality. For the past three

years, the people there have lived in fear, subject to the daily unrelenting dangers that have become the norm on the front line in eastern Ukraine. Residents there speak of daily sniper fire and shelling, and the daily scramble for shelter. For nearly three years, they have survived without gas supplies in the face of plummeting temperatures every winter. Those are the consequences of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

That is what happens when the rule-based system is attacked. We cannot allow it to become the new normal, and we must use all the tools at our disposal in response. The OSCE has a critical role to play, and I would particularly like to commend the role of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, working tirelessly under the able direction of Chief Monitor Apakan. It is thanks to the bravery of the OSCE's monitors that we know what is going on in places like Marinka. It is thanks to them that we know that ceasefire violations have already reached record highs this year.

It is unacceptable that the Mission continues to be fired on and face restrictions on its access. Such actions, so often perpetrated by the separatists, only fuel suspicions that they are concealing activity that is at odds with the Minsk agreements. I hope, therefore, that we can all be clear today that aggression towards monitors must stop and that the Mission must be given unrestricted access to all of Ukraine, including the disengagement areas and those parts of the border with Russia that are not under Ukraine's control.

As we heard yesterday, the long-term solution to the situation in eastern Ukraine requires Russia to end its destabilizing activities in the region, comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements, withdraw its weapons and personnel, use its considerable influence over the separatists to bring an end to the killing and return Crimea to its rightful place as part of Ukraine. That is the only meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine, and until it is taken, the sanctions against Russia must remain in place.

Beyond Ukraine, we should not lose sight of the Council's need to work closely with the Austrian chairmanship of the OSCE in resolving other issues affecting the region and in helping to protect fundamental rights and freedoms. Those issues include the protracted conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh. We also value the vital role that the OSCE plays in risk reduction in the region, and we welcome the launch of the structured dialogue. We support the Chairperson-in-Office's focus on youth and radicalization, where the OSCE, with its cross-dimensional approach to security, can add real value.

If the OSCE is to respond to those and other challenges, we must also continue to strengthen it. One way to do that is through strong appointments, and I am pleased that the United Kingdom has put forward an excellent candidate for the post of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, in a sign of our continued commitment to the organization. We are also pleased that our Ambassador to the OSCE is chairing the OSCE Human Dimension Committee this year and working closely with the Austrian chairship.

In conclusion, events in eastern Ukraine have reinforced just how important the OSCE is to international cooperation. The work being done there is vital to the beleaguered residents of Marinka and to all Ukrainians in the eastern part of the country. Sadly, events in Ukraine highlight the threats that countries in the OSCE area, and the rule-based system as a whole, continue to face. If we are to respond to them effectively, we must continue to strengthen the OSCE, and with it the Security Council's cooperation.

Mr. Vassilenko (Kazakhstan): I would like to thank the Ukrainian presidency for convening this important meeting and to warmly welcome the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, Mr. Sebastian Kurz.

Despite our collective efforts, we are still far from realizing the hopes enshrined seven years ago in the OSCE's Astana Commemorative Declaration and outlined in the organization's founding documents. The Eurasian dimension of the OSCE security space is at the heart of the Astana Declaration and should remain our focus. It is also the area where we may be able to have the greatest positive impact, replacing zero-sum games with win-win scenarios. To achieve that ambition, we will have to overcome the growing threats that are fuelled by shifts in technology, the rise of radicalism and nationalism, pandemics, economic turbulence, the proliferation of nuclear materials and unprecedented numbers of refugees.

The continuing crisis in Ukraine has also shown us how a national tragedy can have global consequences.

It has undermined the security of us all and has exposed stark differences in the way that countries approach security policy.

In the wake of such challenges, Kazakhstan fully supports calls to strengthen the OSCE, its legal status and its institutions. We support in particular the efforts promoted by the Austrian chairmanship and others to strengthen cooperative security, including by strengthening conventional arms control mechanisms and modernizing the Vienna document. We look forward to further discussions on the modalities of the structured dialogue that the Chairperson-in-Office mentioned.

Let me now propose some recommendations on bilateral cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE.

First, the OSCE should continue to be a good partner for countries in transition. It can do that by continuing to promote the principles of good governance, the rule of law, institution-building and the nurturing of a new political culture, working with the participating States and not on them. Secondly, the United Nations should step up cooperation with the OSCE on the promotion of sustainable development, where it has long experience. That partnership should play an active role in shaping the debate regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We believe that the OSCE and the United Nations should work together to end extreme poverty and ensure that we are the last generation to live with climate change as a threat to the future of all of us.

We strongly share the priorities of the Austrian chairmanship in the OSCE's second dimension, and we would like to thank the Austrian chairmanship for appointing the representative of Kazakhstan to chair the Economic and Environmental Committee. Within the context of that second dimension, we fully support the main theme of "Greening the Economy and Building Partnerships for Security", chosen by the Austrian chairmanship as its slogan. We look forward to working together with the Austrian chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat in holding a productive second preparatory meeting of the Economic and Environmental Forum during the Astana Expo-2017, on the subject of future energy. It will be a major event in which more than 110 countries and 18 international organizations will participate.

We consider improving connectivity to be a key tool of long-term development. The OSCE has a part to play in promoting regional trade and transport integration and, ultimately, in the formation of a common economic space from the Atlantic to the Pacific. As a country, we remain committed to the idea of Greater Eurasia, which can bring together the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative in an effort to create a common space of mutually beneficial economic development from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Thirdly, given the OSCE's special attention to transnational threats, we see particular merit in deepening cooperation with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Kazakhstan supports the OSCE in signing joint action plans with United Nations agencies. It is also of benefit to the United Nations to work closely with the OSCE — the world's largest regional security grouping — on transnational threats. Those threats range from the spread of nuclear weapons to countering all forms of regional transnational crime, including the trafficking in persons, drugs and weapons. We welcome the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the OSCE and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs to support regional work on resolution 1540 (2004). That reaffirms that the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Fourthly, Afghanistan's security, political and economic progress and the withdrawal of international forces will continue to have major implications for the OSCE. The exchange of military information and contacts, particularly in the border areas, is of paramount importance. Security in Afghanistan's border areas is also critical to developing new trade and transport corridors. This is a sphere in which there is great potential for the OSCE to build on existing cooperation with the United Nations.

Fifthly, we think that we need to step up our joint efforts in the fight against human trafficking, which is a key issue for both the United Nations and the OSCE. We call in particular for more active cooperation between the OSCE and UNODC, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Labour Organization, UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. That must be done through a comprehensive human rights-based approach to global crime within the OSCE-initiated Alliance against Trafficking in Persons

and under the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking.

Last but not least, let me say that Kazakhstan has always given the OSCE its best. We have supported the organization and worked with all our partners within it to strengthen it and help it to adapt to new challenges before, during and after our chairmanship in 2010. Today, we are prepared to give it one of our brightest and most capable diplomats: the two-time Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov, whom we have nominated for the position of Secretary General of the OSCE. If elected, he would surely serve the best interests of the OSCE and help steer it steadily forward in these complex times.

Let me end by stressing that the OSCE remains one of the United Nations key partner organizations. The nature of our cooperation has to become closer and, at the same time, more expansive, comprehensive and multidimensional, so that it can address all issues of concern for human well-being and security.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia thanks the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, Mr. Sebastian Kurz, for his briefing in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We also congratulate Austria on its assumption of the chairmanship of the OSCE and on its commitment to maintaining peace in Europe.

Bolivia believes that it is important to highlight the work being done by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in its various areas of operation and in maintaining channels of dialogue with different actors. We believe that all conflicts between States should be addressed in strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international human rights law, always with the aim of resolving them peacefully and, at the same time, respecting the principles of the non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the non-use or threat of force, sovereignty and independence.

As we have previously mentioned in the Chamber, Bolivia believes that regional and subregional organizations can play a very important role in maintaining regional stability and security and can contribute decisively in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. On the other hand, it is important to identify the circumstances and action taken by NATO that have contributed to causing conflict situations or to interventionism.

We hope that communication and coordination channels between the United Nations and the OSCE will be maintained and strengthened for the benefit of regional and international peace and security.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank Foreign Minster Kurz for his briefing on the planned activities under the Austrian chairmanship.

The track record of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) clearly demonstrates the unique and significant role that that organization plays in Europe. The United States fully supports the organization's comprehensive approach to security. We look to the OSCE and its independent institutions and field missions to assist all 57 participating States with the full implementation of their OSCE commitments, and we look to the OSCE to hold those States accountable when they fail to do so.

As Ambassador Nikki Haley made clear yesterday, the United States is committed to the institutions that help keep Europe safe (see S/PV.7886). We commend the long-standing commitment and ongoing efforts of the OSCE in support of regional security. From promoting peaceful resolutions to conflicts to working with Governments on the rule of law and anti-corruption, the OSCE plays a key role in strengthening security and stability, addressing humanitarian needs of conflict-afflicted populations and promoting good governance in the region. We believe that the organization should also continue its focus on supporting civil society and independent media and on promoting tolerance and non-discrimination throughout the OSCE region. We urge Mr. Kurz to make the full implementation of all human dimension commitments by all OSCE participating States a priority of his chairmanship.

The commitment and bravery of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine deserves particular recognition. As recent weeks have seen, an increase in violence, including the use of heavy weapons, civilian causalities and damage to critical infrastructure have compounded a desperate humanitarian situation. The Special Monitoring Mission has worked with humanitarian organizations on both sides of the line of contact to ensure that civilians enduring freezing conditions, on top of the relentless fighting have access to heat, water and electricity. OSCE monitors risk their own safety to fulfil their mandate to document

ceasefire violations and to provide critical information of the situation on the ground. They deserve our respect and support as they press all sides to bring an immediate end to violence. They must be granted full and unfettered access and safe passage to better perform their mission, particularly in areas held by Russian-backed separatists.

We continue to be concerned about threats made to the Special Monitoring Mission and underscore the importance of all sides to protect them and their work in monitoring the situation on the ground. The United States continues to support the Minsk agreements and their full and immediate implementation, as the best path to resolve the conflict and alleviate the suffering in eastern Ukraine. This should remain a priority of the OSCE and we reiterate our call on Russia to adhere to its commitments. We must not forget the situation in occupied Crimea. We once again call for an end to the Russian occupation and attempted annexation of the peninsula.

The United States remains fully committed to supporting the OSCE's efforts in other areas as well. In Georgia, the OSCE plays a positive role in keeping all sides accountable and we encourage the Organization to remain actively engaged as the conflict with Russia in Georgia's occupied territories continues to undermind European security. As a participant in the Geneva international discussions, the United States looks forward to continuing our work with the OSCE to find a peaceful resolution that guarantees Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. As one of the three co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, the United States supports the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The sides have made progress over the years towards a comprehensive settlement through this process. We call on the sides to enter into negotiations and complete confidence-building measures agreed last spring. This conflict cannot be resolved by force.

We are firmly committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Transnistria conflict. We believe that the 5+2 talks can play an important role in resolving the conflict, but any 5+2 meeting must deliver concrete results. The OSCE mission must have unrestricted access to all of Moldova, including the Transnistrian region, and we call on the Transnistrian authorities to grant OSCE monitors consistent, unfettered access.

Finally, we would like to highlight the OSCE's vital role in supporting the implementation of our decisions in the Security Council. The OSCE's support for two Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 1540 (2004), is part of the global effort to address weapons' proliferation, and resolution 1325 (2000) to end violence against women and ensure women are at the centre of efforts to resolve conflicts and counter violent extremism.

The United States applauds the OSCE for its work to reinforce security throughout Europe. The United Nations-OSCE relationship is central to the Council's work in the region. We look forward to continuing and deepening the decades of dialogue and cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, for his briefing.

Yesterday's open debate (see S/PV.7886) was a good opportunity for us to recall the major contribution made by the OSCE to promoting security and preventing conflicts in Europe. However, the debate was also a stark reminder that OSCE confidence-building measures are increasingly necessary in light of attempts to forcibly alter the status quo by coercion in some parts of Europe.

As a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, the OSCE is exemplary in supporting the Security Council in maintaining peace and security at the regional level. The OSCE has always held the conviction that maintaining an international order based on the rule of law that condemns the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity and political independence of any State, as well as building confidence among member States through efforts for dialogue and transparency, will bring peace and stability in Europe and the international community. Based on this belief, the OSCE has been taking a comprehensive approach, which encompasses not only politico-military security, but also economic, environmental and human aspects. Japan, as one of OSCE's Asian partners, firmly shares its belief and comprehensive approach. We are pleased to have expanded our cooperation with the OSCE over the past quarter-century.

The situation in Ukraine, as Japan stressed at yesterday's open debate, is of grave concern for the

entire international community. It poses a serious challenge to the international order governed by the rule of law. This is a matter of principle. We have contributed to Ukraine by dispatching a Japanese expert to the Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE in the light of its critical tasks. In addition, Japan is supporting the country's reform efforts to become a more resilient society.

The OSCE is playing an important role in mediation, including in the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh. We applaud the OSCE's hands-on approach to enhancing capacities and resilience in response to emerging issues, such as violent extremism, as well as humanitarian crises involving refugees and immigrants. We look forward to further cooperation with the OSCE on a wide range of issues, including security and counter-terrorism through strengthened border management, election observation missions and women's empowerment.

I would like to mention my first-hand experience with the contribution of the OSCE. From 1999 to 2000, I was seconded to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), where I worked with a young Austrian diplomat named Mr. Jan Kickert, who is present in the Chamber as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Austria. The OSCE was at that time one of the four pillars of our international efforts aimed at the reconstruction of Kosovo. The OSCE and UNMIK cooperated closely in conducting the first local election in October 2000, and it was quite successful. Of course, the path to democracy in Kosovo was not an easy task, but today peace and democracy have taken root in Kosovo to a certain extent. We are very proud of that and it is due, in great part, to the efforts of the OSCE.

Asia and Europe have a certain interconnectivity on peace and security-related issues. Just as tensions in Europe have an impact on the entire international community, including Asia, increased tensions in Asia affect the stability of Europe. Japan is committed to deepening its cooperation with the States members of the OSCE as part of its joint efforts with the OSCE to maintain and consolidate the international order based on the rule of law.

Mr. Skau (Sweden): Let me join others in thanking Foreign Minister Kurz for his briefing this morning and for his leadership as Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The European security order continues to be seriously challenged. The OSCE, as the largest regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, has an indispensable role to play in upholding the rules-based order in the region and in sustaining peace. In the light of that, we welcome and offer our full and active support for the Austrian OSCE chairmanship and the efforts of Minister Kurz.

Based on commonly agreed principles and commitments, as enshrined most notably in the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter, the OSCE offers a unique platform for dialogue on European peace and security. At present, the principle that States should refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State is being violated. Breaches of that core principle, which is enshrined in the United Nations Charter as well as in the OSCE Acquis, are of fundamental concern to all of us. European security, like the security of other regions, depends on a rules-based international order where the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, large and small, is respected.

As we also highlighted in yesterday's open debate on conflicts in Europe, the comprehensive concept of security remains a strength and an added value provided by the OSCE and must be upheld (see S/PV.7886). Respect for democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms remains a precondition for our joint security. It is therefore worrying that the OSCE human-dimension and autonomous institutions — the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner on National Minorities — are under pressure. They are key assets across the conflict cycle and are needed today more than ever. The OSCE Chairmanship has an important role to play as the guardian of those principles and commitments, and in preserving the comprehensive concept of security and those independent institutions.

Today, our fundamental principles continue to be violated by Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, its illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and its military actions in eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, its political independence and right to freely choose its security

arrangements must be fully respected. We reaffirm our strong support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, which much be given full, safe and unhindered access throughout the country.

The so-called protracted conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Nagorno Karabakh also constitute long-lasting violations of our common OSCE acquis. They must be resolved in accordance with international law and OSCE principles and commitments. The Chairs of the Minsk Group have a special responsibility in bringing those processes forward.

There is an obvious need for strong conventional arms-control instruments and confidence-building measures, which contribute to transparency and predictability. In that context, we would especially like to highlight this year's launch of a structured dialogue in the OSCE on current and future challenges and risks aimed at exploring possibilities in the military area for building confidence and reducing risk.

We welcome the Chairmanship's intention to mainstream a gender perspective into all its activities. Gender aspects, including the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), must be an integral part of all our security-related work, in Vienna as well as in the field missions.

In conclusion, in a speech to the Security Council open debate on conflict prevention and sustaining peace on 10 January, Secretary-General Guterres underlined the fundamental importance of restoring trust among Member States so as to prevent and avoid conflict (see S/PV.7857). We therefore welcome the Austrian chairmanship's focus on building trust — a trust that can be regained only through restored respect for common principles and commitments, and through deeds, not words.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the presence at today's meeting of His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Federal Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria, and we thank him for his briefing.

The world today is filled with various types of challenges. Countries are interdependent, and their security is interconnected. While the United Nations is at the core of the international collective-security architecture, regional and subregional organizations enjoy unique advantages in resolving hot-spot issues in their respective regions. China supports enhancing the cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, so as to jointly safeguard international peace and security.

The cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations should, while steadfastly upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, seek vigorously to promote dialogue and consultation aimed at addressing regional and hot-spot issues, actively engage in preventive diplomacy, resolve disputes through peaceful means and defuse conflicts. All relevant actions by the regional and subregional organizations concerned should observe the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular respect for the principles of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States.

The OSCE is an important partner of the United Nations. In recent years, the OSCE has been actively engaged in preventive diplomacy, promoting mutual trust among countries in the region and in endeavouring to settle disputes through mediation. China expresses its appreciation to the OSCE for its efforts.

We welcome the priorities set by Austria as the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office aimed at defusing armed conflicts, countering violent extremism and building mutual trust. China supports effective and pragmatic cooperation between the Security Council and the OSCE in the fields of peace and security, and it is our hope that the OSCE will continue to play an active and constructive role in upholding regional peace, security and stability.

With respect to the question of Ukraine, the parties concerned, including the OSCE, have made some positive efforts, which China welcomes. We hope that the situation in Ukraine will improve as soon as possible. We also hope that all parties concerned will fully implement resolution 2202 (2015) and the Minsk agreements and seek a comprehensive, lasting and balanced solution to the question of Ukraine through dialogue and consultation.

The international community should keep up its support for the diplomatic efforts of the parties concerned aimed at finding a political settlement of the question of Ukraine and at joining forces in contributing

to the achievement of peace, stability and development in the country at an early date.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I would like to thank Foreign Minister Kurz for his exhaustive briefing. I congratulate Austria for assuming the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It is a pleasure to see so many old friends and colleagues in the Austrian delegation. We are looking forward to working together as members of the Troika this year and, as the incoming Chairperson-in-Office, in 2018.

The OSCE is the largest regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. At the very roots of both the United Nations and the OSCE lies the same vision and goal of a rules-based international order, anchored in multilateralism, territorial integrity and equal sovereignty of nations. We stand committed to those principles and to the need to respect them.

Synergies and complementarities between the United Nations and the OSCE remain still untapped potentials to be developed, considering that the OSCE stands as an essential forum for dialogue and cooperation, not only among its participating States, but also with its Mediterranean partners. In that regard, I would like to briefly outline what we consider two main priorities.

First, we deem that the OSCE plays an irreplaceable role in facilitating the settlement of most of the conflicts still affecting Europe. Its prompt engagement in the crisis in Ukraine — which Italy supported by contributing to the activities of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine — demonstrated the organization's vitality and capacity to respond with monitoring and mediation mechanisms. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the OSCE's role in the Trilateral Contact Group are crucial to respect for and implementation of the Minsk agreements and to pursuing political efforts for a sustainable solution to the crisis. We also support the efforts of the Normandy format in seeking a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The OSCE mediation role in protracted conflicts must be underscored. With regard to Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria and Georgia, diplomatic tracks promoted and coordinated by the OSCE stand as the main frameworks to put an end to instability. As the incoming OSCE chair, in 2018, Italy will redouble efforts in that endeavour. Those conflicts are not frozen. Talks have never stopped and should be relaunched especially for the sake of the communities that are involved and bear the heaviest burden.

Secondly, with regard to the Mediterranean dimension, as a member of the OSCE Troika, Italy is chairing the OSCE Contact Group with the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation for maintaining relations with the six Mediterranean partner countries: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel and Jordan. Emerging challenges and conflicts in the Mediterranean and Middle East have an impact on security for the entire OSCE membership. The organization has a role to play in engaging Mediterranean partner countries in political dialogue on transnational threats to our common security.

I would also like to point out the relevance of migration issues for the OSCE. With its holistic approach, field offices and missions, the organization is well equipped to contribute to the international efforts to manage the movement of populations, starting with the exchange of best practices and cooperation with the Mediterranean partners. We therefore welcome and strongly support the decision adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2016 in Hamburg endorsing that view on migration that we will prioritize on our agenda in 2017 and 2018.

As Chairman of the Mediterranean Contact Group and as a Mediterranean country, Italy will focus its programme on combating human trafficking, illicit trafficking of cultural property, cybersecurity, gender equality, economic cooperation, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises, and dialogue among think tanks and policy planners from both shores. To that end, we intend to constructively associate OSCE partner countries with the Contact Group activities. We will build on successful initiatives such as the Carabinieri training course organized by the Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Unit in Vicenza, Italy, under the auspices of the OSCE training project entitled "Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes", which includes participants from partner countries and whose second phase will begin in June. We also have proposed organizing the annual OSCE Mediterranean Conference, under our chairmanship in Sicily in late October, with those priority issues on the agenda.

I should like to conclude by underscoring that the transnational nature of the challenges and threats

to international security that we confront requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. We are strongly committed to promoting such a cross-dimensional approach within both the United Nations and the OSCE. The nexus between security, development and human rights, with a special focus on conflict prevention and the role of women in mediation and in conflict and post-conflict situations, is at the core of the the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the sustaining peace agenda. Therefore, it must be further integrated within the United Nations system and in its cooperation with regional organizations.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I wish to start by congratulating His Excellency Mr. Sebastian Kurz, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, on his becoming Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I would also like to thank him for his comprehensive briefing.

We welcome the significant contribution that the OSCE continues to make in supporting the maintenance of international peace and security as one of the largest regional security organizations. Its comprehensive approach to security, which includes the political, military, economic, environmental and human dimensions, is in line with the new global paradigm aimed at ensuring sustainable peace and development.

In that connection, we take note of the organization's efforts in conflict prevention and resolution as well as post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. Particularly, we appreciate the important role that the OSCE is playing in the efforts to resolve the protracted and new conflicts in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, in cooperation with the United Nations and the European Union.

As we said yesterday during our debate on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886), dialogue and negotiation remain the only way to find a durable and diplomatic solution to some of those conflicts and extremely delicate issues of peace and security affecting States members of the OSCE. We cannot overemphasize the need for the political will and commitment of the parties to some of those conflicts to reach peaceful settlements but also to ensure that agreements are fully respected and implemented. Building the necessary trust and confidence between and among the parties is also very critical to making tangible progress. We are pleased to note that the Austrian chairmanship has made that one of its main priorities. Most importantly, its commitment to continue exerting efforts to enhance informal and alternative channels of communication to improve mutual understanding and trust is very welcome.

As in other regions of the world, the growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism pose a significant security challenge to States members of the OSCE. The organization has been playing a very important role in preventing and combating terrorism by promoting a coordinated approach among member States. In that context, it is only appropriate that the Austrian chairmanship is placing greater emphasize on addressing youth radicalization and violent extremism in the entire OSCE area.

Promoting cooperation with other relevant regional and international organizations will be vital for the OSCE not only in countering terrorism but also in all the other dimensions of its work. Ethiopia attaches great importance to cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, in line with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, we appreciate the partnership between the OSCE and the United Nations, which has been maintained through high-level dialogues and information-sharing, as well as cooperation in the field.

Finally, we wish the Austrian chairmanship success in implementing its priorities towards achieving greater security and stability in the entire OSCE area.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): Today, I welcome the presence of Mr. Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, at the Security Council table and congratulate his country on its assumption of the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for this year. In the challenging strategic environment that Europe is facing today, Austria knows that it can count on our full support to implement its programme of work, which is centred appropriately on the themes of security, conflict resolution and combating radicalization and terrorism. In our view, today more than ever, the OSCE serves as an indispensable toolbox for the security services in Europe, especially on the ground.

In my statement, I will take up two points: the central role of the OSCE in our efforts to end the Ukrainian crisis, and priority challenges on which, more generally, we must get the OSCE to focus.

The current crisis in eastern Ukraine is one of the most serious and dangerous violations of the founding principles of the OSCE, penned in Helsinki more than 40 years ago. It is therefore appropriate that this topic has been a top priority on the organization's agenda for the past three years. The OSCE has been up to the task in responding to the matter, which is a source of satisfaction for us. It has lived up to the responsibility that falls upon it by rapidly deploying monitoring missions and subsequently assuming a central role in ensuring the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which remain the only way forward for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

As I had the opportunity to say during yesterday's open debate on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886), France has been deeply concerned by the recent escalation of tensions on the ground, in particular around the town of Avdiivka, as well as its direct consequences in terms of the human toll and the worsening of the humanitarian situation. France is also determined, in conjunction with its German partners, to pursue mediation efforts within the Normandy format, as every bit of progress counts and we see no alternative solution for supporting the Minsk agreements.

The ministerial meeting held in Munich on Saturday made it possible to agree on specific commitments aimed at fostering a rapid improvement in the situation on the ground. Those commitments include the implementation of an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the protection of critical infrastructure, the effective disengagement of the most sensitive areas, the exchange of prisoners and access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to detention facilities. It is essential that they be implemented as soon as possible, and we count on the unanimous support of the Council in that respect.

We remain convinced more than ever that the OSCE and its field missions have an essential role to play in ensuring the practical implementation of decisions taken at the political level. In that regard, it is crucial that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine be in a position to fully and freely carry out its mandate. We reiterate our call for the respect for the full freedom of movement of its observers, whose security must be guaranteed, and condemn in the strongest terms any violation of these principles — whether it takes the form of intimidation, threats, destruction of equipment or denied access to certain areas. The involvement of the OSCE in securing local elections in the Donbas will also be necessary, in ways that remain to be determined. Finally, I reiterate my country's commitment to defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. I note that France strongly condemns and does not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

Beyond Ukraine, the OSCE remains more than ever an essential instrument for the promotion of peace and security in Europe, amid diverse threats. The situation should encourage its 57 members to abandon political posturing and rediscover the spirit of Helsinki, which, more than 40 years ago, gave rise to a common vision of security in Europe. In that context, we believe that the work of the OSCE should now focus on the following issues.

First is the resolution of regional conflicts. Beyond the Ukrainian case, we cannot accept the persistence of frozen conflicts in various parts of the European continent, whether in Nagorno Karabakh, Transnistria or the separatist territories of Georgia. We are convinced that the role of the OSCE is central to each, together with the established mediation formats, in order to promote dialogue and restore confidence. Achieving tangible progress on each of those fronts is in the interest of the concerned countries, but also of the region as a whole. We are particularly attached to the outcome.

Next is the revival of conventional arms control in Europe. There can be no strategic stability without a set of common rules to frame military competition. We are therefore in favour of continuing discussions on arms control, confidence-building, transparency and risk-reduction measures, initiated last year under the German chairmanship in the context of the OSCE's structured dialogue.

Maintaining the centrality of the democracy and human rights pillar in the work of the OSCE is equally important. While a multidimensional approach has always been at the heart of the functioning of the OSCE, we are concerned about the tendency of some member States to increasingly politicize or even refuse to address human dimension issues. Specifically, the introduction of a selective approach to combating discrimination is unacceptable.

Last is the development of the operational role of the OSCE in response to certain emerging challenges. I am thinking of the fight against human trafficking, the prevention of radicalization, and climate change. The

OSCE must work on each of those issues, which are priority security challenges for Europe, and respond with concrete measures that go beyond mere public posturing and statement of positions.

I shall conclude my remarks by recalling the strong convergences between the action of the OSCE and that of the United Nations, whether on the ground — where their respective missions continue their integrated action, from the Balkans to the Caucasus and Central Asia — or on principles, with a common approach linking security, development and human rights concerns.

Mr. Rivas (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this informative meeting. I also thank the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Integration, Mr. Sebastian Kurz, for his detailed briefing.

As was mentioned yesterday (see S/PV.7886), at a time when the world is ravaged by new risks, such as violent extremism, nationalism, organized crimes and other factors, that are enmeshed in a feedback loop within unresolved conflicts, it is more important than ever to have the support of solid international, regional and sub-regional organizations acting in a coordinated manner.

Uruguay attaches the greatest importance to cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the framework of Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. In that respect, my country participates in valuable regional organizations and mechanisms, some long-standing like the Organization of American States and the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, established pursuant to the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean, and others more recent, like the Union of South American Nations and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, which have proven their worth and have contributed to peace in the region. The role played by the regional organizations in matters of good offices, mediation and peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as in the appropriate implementation of their control mechanisms, is based on intimate knowledge of local realities and provides a crucial supplement to the work of the United Nations.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe is the broadest organization dealing with collective security. It covers a wide geographic area and has 57 members, as others have mentioned. It has a great deal of experience in resolving conflicts. Uruguay recognizes the organization's values and the ten principles of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which are in line with the purposes and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

We also recognize the contribution of the organization to the promotion of mechanisms for dialogue, confidence-building and conflict-resolution measures, as well as the work it carries out through its various missions on the ground that support the implementation of the relevant regional agreements. Among its priorities are important topics germane to international peace and security, such as the current conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Nagorno Karabakh and Ukraine, as well as the fight against radicalization and terrorism, and the protection of human rights. I would like to stress the momentum that accompanies the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) and the employment of a gender-sensitive approach in its work in various conflict situations.

Finally, I wish Austria every success in its chairmanship and in the attainment of its objectives, which will surely contribute to a peace that will transcend the European continent and benefit us all.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to welcome the holding of the annual meeting of the Security Council on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), born of the shared vision of 55 countries in Europe, North America and Asia of peace through cooperation.

On this important occasion, my delegation welcomes the participation of the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Mr. Sebastian Kurz and Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Integration, whom I thank for his remarkable briefing.

Following up on the public debate that the Security Council held yesterday on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886), this morning's meeting provides an opportunity to look at the political and security situation in the Euro-Asian area. Bearing in mind its experience of two world wars in the space of one generation, Europe has met the challenges of its time by establishing an architecture for cooperation in the area of early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. The various events that

have marked the life of the OSCE since the signing of the Helsinki Accord show, as if that were necessary, the relevance of its mission in the light of the scale and the serious nature of the challenges facing it. For that reason, I would like to commend the commitment of the Austrian chairmanship to bringing together the efforts of all its members with a view to resolving ongoing crises and conflicts, re-establishing mutual trust and limiting the growth of violent extremism and terrorism.

The Austrian chairmanship of the OSCE comes at a time when Europe is experiencing its most troubled times since the end of the Cold War. From Ukraine to Nagorno Karabakh, from Georgia to Transnistria, the OSCE is encountering serious challenges, in addition to cross-border challenges that include radicalization, terrorism, arms control, crime, cybercrime, migration and trafficking in drugs, weapons and human beings. For that reason, I share the view of the presidency that a strong OSCE is the very foundation of a safe Europe. Senegal is convinced that the peaceful settlement of conflicts throughout the world must be welcomed. We therefore also welcome the approach to conflicts through dialogue and cooperation, particularly between neighbouring countries.

The situation in eastern Ukraine is very serious. Following three years of conflict with a heavy loss of life totalling 10,000 persons, it is obvious that there can be no military solution to that conflict. It is therefore absolutely vital to enhance efforts to implement the Minsk agreements, endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2202 (2015). My delegation therefore expresses its support for the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine and the Normandy format, and we commend their tireless efforts to find a political solution to the conflict.

Similarly, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict must be at the heart of OSCE's work. We are convinced that the OSCE will continue to work to convene a conference that could serve as the basis for a peaceful negotiated settlement of the crisis, pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions. To that end, we must step up efforts to ensure that a cessation of hostilities agreement is reached and a peace process established under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, in the interest of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States.

I would also like to stress the importance of pursuing the peace efforts to resolve the Transnistria conflict in the 5+2 negotiation format, on the one hand, and the Geneva international discussions seeking to resolve the Georgian conflict, on the other. We should also mention the need to deal with radicalization and violent extremism. We know that 10,000 persons from the OSCE region have gone to serve as foreign terrorist fighters. The priority must therefore be to prevent that phenomenon from deteriorating, as it undermines the very foundations of our societies.

Although the challenges are complex and enormous, they can still be resolved by a continent that has all the necessary tools to prevent conflicts and to maintain and establish peace, provided that the parties accept to resolve the ongoing conflicts while respecting international law. We would like to commend the idea of enhancing the partnership between the OSCE and the United Nations, whose support would be very valuable in that regard.

In conclusion, I would like to express Senegal's support for the ideal underlying the Helsinki Final Act, namely, to establish a Euro-Atlantic and Atlantic-Asian region that is one of shared values of freedom, democracy and justice.

Mr. Kandeel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I extend a very heartfelt thanks to Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Foreign Minister of Austria and Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). I thank him for his very detailed briefing on the future priorities of that organization. We have always emphasized the importance of regional organizations, including the OSCE, in the area of international peace and security under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. We support the Austrian priorities in tackling current challenges, namely, de-escalating conflicts in the region; countering extremism, in particular among youth; countering confrontations between countries; and maintaining opening communication between the parties to the various conflicts.

We also appreciate the efforts of the OSCE to find a political solution to various long-standing conflicts, including in Ukraine, Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia and elsewhere. In that connection, we reaffirm that there is no military solution to the conflicts in the region. There is no alternative to bolstering efforts to launch constructive dialogues aimed at seeking political solutions to conflicts. We urge all parties to shoulder their responsibility and demonstrate the necessary political will to solve those conflicts peacefully. We

note in particular the attempts by the OSCE to pool efforts for a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine, in line with the Minsk agreements, which offer the most promising framework for a lasting solution.

We also support the mediation efforts undertaken by various actors, which enjoy the respect of the parties themselves and of the international community. There are close links between security in Europe and security in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. We should strengthen our ties with the OSCE, in the framework of cooperation with our Mediterranean partners, in order to resolve crises in the region, first and foremost the crises in Libya and Syria.

I would also like to cite terrorism and extremism, which require the strengthening of dialogue between religions and civilizations in order to confront Islamophobia and solve problems related to immigration, the protection of refugees, and trafficking in human persons in the Mediterranean, among others. We call for a strengthening of international efforts — with the participation of all interested parties, including the OSCE — to eradicate terrorism through a global approach that is not limited to military and security solutions, but also takes into account the cultural, economic and developmental dimensions.

Egypt is one of the OSCE's partners in the Mediterranean and will spare no effort in working to achieve these goals, in particular by adopting cooperation frameworks between the OSCE and moderate religious institutions, such as the Al-Azhar mosque, in order to enhance religious dialogue. This is one of the most important areas of work in the framework of a global strategy to counter terrorism and extremism.

Common security in the Mediterranean requires identifying the root causes of existing problems. It also requires seeking lasting and permanent solutions through constructive dialogue among the countries of the region. Egypt would like in the near future to see greater cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the OSCE, so that our shared vision can be translated into concrete measures that will help to strengthen our cooperation.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ukraine.

I wish to thank Minister Kurz for his comprehensive presentation of the priorities of the Austrian chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for 2017. We appreciate his personal dedication in trying to find effective responses on the part of the OSCE community to the significant security threats and challenges confronting the participating States.

As recognized at the OSCE, the ongoing aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and its severe consequences remain among the top threats to European security. It is important that defusing tensions and facilitating the resolution of the crisis in and around Ukraine be identified as priorities of the Austrian chairmanship. Three years ago, the Russian Federation effectively violated the United Nations Charter and all 10 principles of the Helsinki Final Act by resorting to armed aggression against the sovereign State of Ukraine, the illegal occupation of Crimea and hybrid warfare in Donbas. The re-establishment of full respect for these principles is the way to restore the security order based on the OSCE process and the lessons of the Second World War.

We therefore commend the determination of the Austrian chairmanship to protect the OSCE's fundamental principles and commitments, as it recently demonstrated by condemning Russia's unilateral measures on recognizing the so-called documents issued by illegal structures in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

These actions on the part of Russia once again defied the OSCE principles and the Minsk agreements. We welcome the readiness of the chairmanship to exercise leadership in performing its functions, which is so urgently needed in these turbulent times for the OSCE community.

As the recent spike in hostilities near Avdiivka in Donbas has shown, the situation in the conflict-affected areas remains volatile and unpredictable. Escalation is possible whenever the Russian Federation considers it politically necessary or just convenient. The military assault by the hybrid Russian forces on Avdiivka, accompanied by massive shelling along the entire line of contact, demonstrated Russia's persistent unwillingness to honour its Minsk commitments, including their first provision of a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire. Russia's political goal of undermining Ukraine, which set in motion its aggression against my country three years ago, remains unchanged. Instead of a full and good-faith implementation of the Minsk commitments,

Russia is resorting to political and military provocations, blackmail and political pressure.

We commend the immediate response of the OSCE chairmanship and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in highlighting the scale of the offensive of the hybrid Russian forces and of its grave humanitarian impact. We appreciate the international diplomatic and political pressure brought to bear on the Russian Federation to stop the escalation, which has contributed to some improvement in the security situation in the conflict area. A persistent focus, in particular at the OSCE and in the Security Council, on security and a peaceful resolution is needed to discourage Russia from future provocations and escalations and to force it to implement in full the commitments undertaken.

The OSCE, the Trilateral Contact Group and its humanitarian subgroup should pay particular attention to achieving the immediate and unconditional release of Ukrainian citizens who remain illegally detained as hostages or political prisoners in the occupied areas of Donbas and in Crimea, as well as in the Russian Federation. The international community must maintain a united position in order to secure their release.

The resolution of the crisis in and around Ukraine, as the Russia-instigated conflict is called in the OSCE, requires not only a peaceful resolution of the situation in Donbas, with full respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but also the de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula, which is an integral part of Ukraine.

As the illegal occupation continues, so do the gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by Russia's occupation authorities.

In its resolution 71/205, entitled "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)", adopted on 19 December 2016, the General Assembly was absolutely clear about the extrajudicial killings, abductions, enforced disappearances, politically motivated prosecutions, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, violence, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment against the residents of Crimea. The freedoms of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly have been suppressed.

We must use all of the diplomatic assets and international instruments at our disposal to make sure that Crimea does not become an exclusion zone with regard to basic human rights. We encourage the OSCE chairmanship and institutions to pay close attention to the people in the occupied territory and to the alleviation of their plight.

We welcome the intention of the Austrian chairmanship to strengthen the OSCE as an organization that can effectively and in a timely manner fulfil the tasks entrusted to it by participating States.

The implementation of the Minsk agreements and the OSCE's role in terms of monitoring, verification and mediation require adequate resources. We encourage Minister Kurz's support for the efforts of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to facilitate the resolution of the conflict in Donbas, which was started by Russia. Among the immediate tasks are ensuring the effectiveness of the monitoring and verification of the ceasefire and of the withdrawal of weapons, and the establishment of permanent monitoring at the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian State border, as set out in the Minsk agreements. The Mission's monitoring capabilities should be strengthened through increased use of high-technology equipment, including unmanned aerial vehicles, cameras and night-vision equipment.

Special Monitoring Mission monitors face restrictions on movement and intimidation by the hybrid Russian forces in Donbas in their everyday activities. This is quite alarming. We encourage further discussions under the Austrian chairmanship on how to ensure security before, during and after the local elections in Donbas as a key element of the political settlement of the conflict, which will be possible only after all the necessary security prerequisites have been put in place.

We welcome and support the Austrian chairmanship's priorities on strengthening instruments for conflict prevention and resolution, modernizing OSCE confidence- and security-building measures and launching a structured dialogue addressing the prevailing threats and the possible way forward.

My country is suffering as a result of terrorism and the terrorist groups regularly sent from the Russian Federation into Donbas through the uncontrolled segment of the State border with Ukraine. We are therefore interested in a sustained focus on the practical implementation of the counter-terrorism declaration adopted in Hamburg, as well as in strengthening border security, including by countering the phenomenon of

foreign terrorist fighters and other non-State actors. We see benefit in fostering international cooperation in these areas. In the meantime, Ukraine will continue to take legal steps to counter terrorist activity on its territory, in particular by bringing terrorists to justice and by submitting to the International Court of Justice the case of Russia's violation of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

We support the intention of the Austrian chairmanship to dedicate special attention to cybersecurity and the further development of confidence- and security-building measures in the area. Ukraine is ready to share its own experience in investigating and countering cyberattacks on critical energy infrastructure.

The human dimension is at the core of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. We support the Austrian chairmanship's determination to promote enhanced implementation of respective commitments, including in such areas as freedom of assembly and association, freedom of media and expression, freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination. Strengthened cooperation with civil society should be an integral part of these efforts. We believe that such thematic issues as countering State propaganda, eradicating the phenomenon of political prisoners, combating torture and forced disappearances, and ensuring the rights of internally displaced persons and refugees should stay high on the OSCE agenda. There can be no security without respect to human dignity, the rule of law and fundamental human rights.

In conclusion, let me wish Austria a successful chairmanship and practical outcomes in addressing key security threats and challenges that undermine peace and stability in the OSCE space.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7888

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7888th meeting
Wednesday, 22 February 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Arancibia Fernández
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mrs. Audouard
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/144)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-04648 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/144)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/144, the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: As this is my first time before the Council since the very sad and sudden news of the passing of the former Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin, I want to convey my deep respect and sympathies to his family, to the Russian people and the Government, and to all his diplomatic colleagues.

Three years ago to the day, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2139 (2014). Next month we will mark a grim anniversary — six years of war that have devastated a nation, its people and its children. Syrians have seen their country reduced to rubble and their loved ones killed and injured. The majority of the population — some 13.5 million people — are in dire need of protection and humanitarian assistance. Nearly 85 per cent of Syrians live in poverty, with more than two-thirds of the population living in either extreme or abject poverty. Over 12.8 million people in Syria require health assistance, and more than 7 million are food-insecure amidst rising prices and food shortages. Households spend up to a quarter of their income just on water. Total wheat production in 2016 was 1.3 million metric tons, a reduction of 45 per cent relative to 2015, and 63 per cent relative to pre-crisis levels. The destruction of essential infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, the devaluation of the currency, the impact of sanctions, rising food prices, the shortages of food and electricity, as well as a lack of clean water, have exacted a high toll on the majority of Syrian families and communities throughout the country.

In 2016, the rate of displacement continued unabated, with an average of over 5,000 people displaced per day between January and December, some more than once. Over half of all Syrians have been forced from their homes since 2011, 6.3 million of whom are internally displaced. More than 4.9 million have registered as refugees in neighbouring countries, and nearly 1.2 million Syrians have applied for asylum in Europe.

The children caught up in this war have fared the worst. They have been killed and maimed, lost parents to the violence, suffered physical and psychological trauma, been forced into early marriages, and fallen years behind in school. Recruitment — very often through indoctrination, abduction, arrest and coercion — has been widespread in all areas, with 90 per cent of the 217 surveyed subdistricts in Syria reporting its occurrence.

The lack of economic and educational opportunities, the experiences of violence, displacement, profound distress, family loss and the deprivation of psychosocial needs — such as a sense of purpose, control and significance — have all been major drivers of vulnerability. Child labour, owing to the widespread devastation of livelihoods and family separation, was reported in 82 per cent of surveyed subdistricts across the country, including its most dangerous and hazardous forms, namely, begging, smuggling, scavenging, recruitment and the use of children in the conflict and illicit activities.

Moreover, with the war entering its sixth year, 5.82 million children and young people, from preschool to secondary-school age, including more than 118,000 Palestinian refugee children, are in need of education assistance inside Syria. An estimated 1.75 million children, or almost one third of school-age children between 5 and 17 years old, are out of school. A further 1.35 million are at risk of dropping out. Syria's formal education system has lost a total of 150,000 education personnel and seen 7,400 schools — one in three

in the country — damaged, destroyed or otherwise made inaccessible. Owing to severe poverty, parents and caregivers can no longer consider their children's education a priority, with ever-increasing numbers having to remain out of school in order to support their households.

As we move ahead in 2017 towards what I hope will be a year that brings positive change to Syria, we must continue to remember just how much has been lost and the abyss from which Syria will have to emerge. Let me say that even if a political agreement were to be found tomorrow — which, of course, we all wholeheartedly desire — humanitarian needs will remain critical for months, if not years, to come. I therefore cannot emphasize strongly enough my support for all efforts to see the guns fall silent. I am, however, concerned about ongoing significant attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure that are being conducted with seeming impunity. They include bombardments and air strikes in Idlib and Dar'a, and besieged locations in the eastern Ghouta area, most notably in Duma, Harasta, Zamalka, Jobar and Arbin.

Earlier this month, the Government of Syria and the Russian Federation announced the opening of several corridors for civilians wishing to leave eastern Ghouta, one of which is through the Al-Wafedin camp. We are monitoring the situation closely, but we are concerned that the situation in eastern Ghouta may become even more tense in the coming period, should military operations increase. We are also gravely concerned about the situation in the Al-Waer neighbourhood of the city of Homs, which has been exposed to heavy aerial bombing and artillery shelling in recent days, reportedly resulting in more than 20 civilian casualties, many of them children. The shelling also affected Al-Bir hospital, the only semi-functioning medical centre in besieged Al-Waer, as well as the civil defence centre and the ambulance centre, which resulted in the death of a first-aid worker. Life in Al-Waer, which the United Nations has not been able to reach since 26 October, is becoming increasingly dire, with tens of thousands of people in need of immediate humanitarian assistance after suffering under numerous reported air strikes in recent weeks.

To the south, a substantial increase in conflict around Dar'a city was recorded on 12 February. As a precaution, all schools and universities, in both Government areas and those controlled by non-State armed groups, have been temporarily closed owing to the heavy clashes, aerial bombardment, and artillery shelling. On 19 February, Jaysh Khalid Bin Al-Walid, an affiliate of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), commenced an attack on Free Syrian Army positions on three fronts, looking to break out of the Yarmouk valley. Since the morning of 19 February, it has taken over Tseel, which has an estimated population of 34,000, Jlein and Masaken Jlein, with a combined population of 9,200, and Edoin, with a population of 4,900. Most of the residents of those villages are now reported to be under curfew, limiting their ability to flee. Along with Free Syrian Army affiliates, Jaysh Khalid Bin Al-Walid has reportedly beheaded at least one local council leader in the areas it has newly taken over. Many staff of non-governmental organizations were unable to flee before the Jaysh Khalid Bin Al-Walid advance and have now gone radio silent in those villages. Attacks have also taken place elsewhere in Dar'a governorate, with air strikes reportedly hitting six medical centres and health points on 15 February in Saida, Yadouda, Naima, Nasib, Al-Jiza, and Al-Ghana Al-Sharkia, causing severe damage to facilities and putting some of them out of service. The Al-Balad field hospital in Dar'a also appears to have been hit by an air strike and put out of service.

Owing to the increase in fighting in Rif Damascus, Idlib, Dar'a and other governorates, humanitarian access to some of those areas has been further limited. In Idlib, infighting between the Al-Nusra Front, also known as Jabhat Fateh Al-Sham, and non-Nusra groups has resulted in restricted humanitarian programming and civilian movement. On 24 January, United Nations assistance through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing point was suspended for a day as a result of increased insecurity, and humanitarian actors restricted their programming for most of the last week of January, affecting 2 million people in Idlib governorate, including 900,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). To the south, the Ar-Ramtha border crossing point has been suspended since 13 February, owing to the intensified attacks in and around Dar'a city. Fighting in the south has also displaced more than 10,000 people from Dar'a city, many of whom have moved to farms and villages south-east of the city. More are likely to be displaced in the coming days if the violence continues. The displacements put further strain on a population already deeply affected by the conflict. In addition, ongoing movements into Idlib and the western Aleppo countryside, owing to evacuations and local

agreements, are increasing the humanitarian needs in many of these locations.

In the besieged four towns of Al-Zabadani, Al-Fuah, Kafraya and Madaya, which were last reached on 28 November, the situation is catastrophic, with more than 64,000 civilians trapped in a cycle of daily violence and deprivation, where malnutrition and the lack of proper medical care persist. The situation is compounded by the tit-for-tat arrangement between the four towns, which encumbers humanitarian access by imposing painstaking negotiations that are rooted in political and opportunistic considerations rather than humanitarian principles and obligations. Five people have died in Madaya and Kafraya in the past few days, among them a mother who died while giving birth. Another 80 people must be urgently evacuated if their lives are to be saved. They and others are in dire need and cannot wait any longer. I truly hope that the members of the Council and of the newly established joint group will manage to unlock this horrific gridlock on the four towns and compel the parties on the ground to enable immediate humanitarian assistance, including medical evacuations, without any further delay.

I continue to be gravely concerned about the fact that military operations against ISIL continue to result in civilian suffering. In recent weeks, for example, air strikes and fighting around both Al-Raqqa and Al-Bab have resulted in numerous civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, as well as displacements. To date, the United Nations has received reports of approximately 300 civilians killed, mainly owing to air strikes and improvised explosive devices. Civilians have also been subjected to gunfire, with ISIL fighters shooting at civilians who try to leave towards areas controlled by non-State armed groups and, in some cases, non-State armed groups shooting at civilians who appear to have been mistaken for ISIL elements.

As various parties pick up the pace to enter Al-Raqqa and Al-Bab, and as ISIL retreats, bridges, water systems and other elements of civilian infrastructure are being attacked and destroyed. Syria's Tabgah dam on the Euphrates River is a strategic facility that holds about 14 billion cubic metres of water for drinking and irrigation purposes and produces about 2.5 billion kilowatts of electricity a year. Such a facility must be protected from the effects of the ongoing conflict in the eastern and northern regions, where any damage or misuse of the dam could potentially cause significant flooding across Raqqa and even as far as Deir ez-Zor, should the dam fail. Heavy flooding would likely have catastrophic humanitarian consequences in downstream areas, submerging huge swathes of agricultural land, and affecting hundreds of thousands of people who already face critical problems in meeting their immediate needs. And as fighting moves into urban areas, there is grave concern that there will be a significant increase in civilian casualties. In recognition of the fact that civilians trapped in areas controlled by listed terrorist groups are already facing human rights abuses and humanitarian suffering, efforts to retake such areas must be undertaken with the utmost care for the plight of the many hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in those locations.

As we all know, the United Nations and its implementing partners reach millions of Syrians via regular and cross-border programming each month. The lack of safe, unimpeded and sustained access remains, however, the greatest obstacle to reaching people in need in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The cumulative reach of humanitarian actors to besieged and hard-to-reach areas through inter-agency convoys and airdrops increased from 620,000 in 2015 to more than 3.3 million in 2016.

Yet, despite this considerable improvement, humanitarian actors are all too seldom able to deliver life-saving assistance and protection services in a timely, effective, sustainable and strictly needs-based basis. A review of inter-agency cross-border convoys in 2016 showed that a lack of predictable access prevented the implementation of two-thirds of the requests initially approved by the Government of Syria. These were primarily due to administrative, security and operational constraints. During the second half of 2016, inter-agency convoys were only allowed to proceed during the last 10 working days of the month, and those convoys that did deploy had medical items routinely removed. In fact, 67 of the 99 inter-agency cross-line convoys in 2016 had a significant number of medical items removed.

As previously stated, in December last year, only one convoy was deployed throughout that month, to Khan al-Shih reaching 6,000 people, despite the fact that the United Nations had received initial approvals to reach almost 800,000 people in hard-to-reach and besieged locations. Similarly, in January, only a single convoy could be deployed, delivering aid to 40,000 people in Mu'addamiyah al-Sham. And so far, in February, only

two convoys have been able to deploy — to Talbiseh on 5 February delivering aid to 84,000, and to Ar-Rastan on 12 February with assistance to 107,500 people.

Insecurity has also forced the United Nations to abort two convoys in as many days to Al-Waer just this past week. Some 50,000 civilians in Al-Waer are facing ever-worsening humanitarian conditions and have not received humanitarian assistance for 117 days. On 19 February, the loaded convoy was forced to turn around owing to the security situation on the ground, including an incident in which a person was injured owing to a shot by a sniper. On 20 February, prior to reaching Al-Waer, the loaded the convoy was unable to proceed owing to ongoing shelling and sporadic fire. On its way back to the warehouse, several trucks filled with humanitarian supplies were diverted by civilians and unknown armed elements to a Government-controlled area. The drivers and trucks were temporarily detained and some drivers were reportedly roughed up, but have since been released, but without their humanitarian supplies. Everyone, I am pleased to say, is safe and accounted for.

I condemn this incident in the strongest possible terms and I am shocked at the blatant disregard for the protection of humanitarian workers and humanitarian assets. The United Nations will continue to try to reach the 50,000 people in need in Al-Waer with multisectoral assistance, as soon as conditions allow. I call on all parties to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers and assets at all times, in line with their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.

I once again urge all Member States with influence to ensure that a zero or near-zero implementation rate does not occur again in the weeks and months to come, whether that is because of administrative, security or operational constraints. The United Nations and its partners are ready and capable of delivering humanitarian assistance in challenging conditions to 300,000 people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas per week, in addition to regular programming supporting millions. We must be given the chance to do so, as the lives of many depend upon regular and unimpeded deliveries of humanitarian assistance. What we need are timely approvals and simplified approval procedures.

In this regard, and in response to the request of the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in early January, as well as sustained advocacy at the level of the Humanitarian Task Force, we received commitments on the part of the Government of Syria that procedures for cross-line convoys would be simplified. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent was to now act as the main entry point for the facilitation of convoys with Government entities. We are now waiting to receive the final proposed procedural changes in writing for review. We sincerely hope that these changes will effectively address some of the bureaucratic bottlenecks that have caused the many delays in the past.

Let me also reiterate that cross-border assistance from Turkey and Jordan continues to represent a core element of the humanitarian response. This is especially important since the needs are growing as local agreements are sending more people to the north, as well as to some locations in southern Syria — locations which are already strained by the current IDP population, with 900,000 IDPs in Idlib governorate alone, for example. Consequently, the United Nations and its partners' cross-border deliveries have steadily increased since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014) in July 2014. That same year, 624 trucks were inspected before crossing the border into Syria, of which 172 trucks crossed into Syria via Ar-Ramtha, Jordan, and 120 trucks via Bab al-Salam, Turkey, and 332 trucks via Bab al-Hawa, Turkey. One year later, numbers rose to more than 4,882 trucks and last year, in 2016, 6,587 trucks were inspected, of which 1,278 trucks crossed the border point of Ar-Ramtha, 495 trucks entered Syria via Bab al-Salam, and 4,814 trucks via Bab al-Hawa. I would also like to specifically point out that the bulk of our humanitarian response has been implemented by a vast panoply of non-governmental organization partners on the ground. They must be protected at all times and under all circumstances.

Let me conclude, if I may, by saying this. The eyes of all Syria and the eyes of all the world are looking to Geneva. As has been stated so many times already, there is no humanitarian or military solution to this conflict. A genuine political commitment to peace will be needed if 2017 is to offer any different prospect than the death and destruction of the past six years. Millions of battered and beleaguered women, men and children depend on meaningful action and constructive engagement by the Syrian parties and their allies, starting tomorrow at the intra-Syrian negotiations in Geneva, to assure Syrians that an end to the conflict may finally be within reach.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

The representative of Uruguay has asked to make a statement.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Protocol, custom and good manners dictate that one must thank Stephen O'Brien for his report (S/2017/144), despite the fact that every one of his paragraphs feels more like a direct blow to the heart than information for our intellects. Mr. O'Brien places us squarely in front of the frightening reality that millions of people — hundreds of thousands of women, children and sick people — have been facing for the past six years in Syria. In this Chamber, we are once again delivering speeches.

Stephen O'Brien underscored, and every time we hear him he underscores it more, the bravery, valour and self-sacrifice of all of those anonymous humanitarian volunteers and workers on the ground, who while risking their own lives on a daily basis try to relieve the suffering of the affected people.

We are approaching the sixth anniversary of the beginning of the Syrian conflict. As we said one year ago, we hope that this will be the last year of the conflict. We have faith in the strong commitment expressed by the Secretary-General António Guterres, who must always be supported by Council members and by all the parties involved in one way or another in Syria.

After more than two months, we can say that the cessation of hostilities agreed in the waning days of 2016 has enabled a sharp drop in violence in some parts of the Syrian territory, despite numerous violations and fighting that still persist. It has allowed the delivery of relief to millions of inhabitants in Syria, who in recent years have only known war, bombing, destruction and death. It made helped to establish a propitious environment for the Astana meeting held in January and the resumption of the negotiations in Geneva between Government representatives and the opposition in Syria, with the mediation of Special Envoy Mr. Staffan de Mistura. We hope that the parties can now move forward in order to overcome their mutual distrust and make progress in the political transition process in Syria, which after a year of delays, is more necessary than ever.

Despite this more positive scenario at the political level, the situation of civilians in Syria remains alarming. It is very disturbing that despite the ongoing cessation of hostilities, humanitarian access seems to be getting worse month after month. It seems that humanitarian access continues to be increasingly difficult with each passing month. That is an unacceptable state of affairs and can no longer be tolerated, as millions of people depend on those deliveries. That is why it is necessary to confront the obstructions to the regular provision of humanitarian aid — primarily, the insecurity on the ground and the lack of administrative authorization.

Similarly, the lack of consensus among the parties regarding the ceasefire agreements in four locations — Al-Fu'ah, Kafraya, Madaya and Zabadani — signals a new and imminent humanitarian catastrophe that could lead to tragic scenes like those we witnessed one year ago when the population was literally dying of hunger. It is appalling to once again hear reports of medical kits being taken from the convoys, actions that constitute crimes against humanity, as the aid was to be delivered to the most vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women, children and the infirm. We note that aerial deliveries to Deir ez-Zor, which had been suspended in mid-January, have fortunately been resumed. We are also pleased that the ceasefire in Wadi Barada has allowed a partial resumption of the drinking water supply to Damascus.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate Uruguay's view on what our priorities should be if hope to significantly improve t... humanitarian situation of Syria's civilian population: the consolidation of ceasefires throughout most of the country; the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure by all parties to the conflict; the protection of hospitals, medical and health personnel, and educational establishments, as well as their personnel and students; the urgent raising of sieges, which have no place in the twenty-first century; immediate, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout the country, in keeping with the monthly plans that the United Nations has submitted to the Syrian authorities; and the ongoing and relentless fight against terrorism in all of its forms, particularly in Al-Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, while always keeping the protection of civilians as the top priority; and progress towards a political solution to the conflict, which we hope the Special Envoy to the Secretary-General for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, will inform us of as soon as possible.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7889

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7889th meeting

Thursday, 23 February 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Arancibia Fernández
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Audouard
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/81)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-04811 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/81)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/142, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/81, which contains a letter dated 27 January 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2342 (2017).

The meeting rose at 10.05 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7890

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7890th meeting

Thursday, 23 February 2017, 10.05 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Arancibia Fernández
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Audouard
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (S/2017/111)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-04817 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Guinea-Bissau

Report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (S/2017/111)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/153, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Senegal.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/111, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): As the penholder for this topic, the delegation of Senegal welcomes this opportunity to introduce the draft resolution before us (S/2017/153) with a view to extending the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) until 28 February 2018. My delegation takes this opportunity to thank all the members of the Security Council, express its gratitude for their constructive cooperation and contribution to the negotiations on the draft resolution, with special gratitude to the experts of all delegations.

In the draft resolution, the Security Council takes note of the Secretary-General's report on Guinea-Bissau of 7 February (S/2017/111) and expresses its full support to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Head of UNIOGBIS, Mr. Modibo Ibrahim Touré. Through the draft resolution, the Council endorses the recommendations made by the Department of Political Affairs, which carried out a strategic analysis of UNIOGBIS aimed at refocusing its work on its political capacities, including through support for the good offices and mediation role of the Special Representative, thereby streamlining its management structure through the creation of a single post of deputy special representative for rule of law and deputy head of mission, who would also serve as coordinator.

The Council also notes with concern the institutional and political tensions that persist between the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly and other leaders of the political parties. In short, the political impasse would appear to be centred on the political class of Guinea-Bissau. In that context, the Council believes that the security and defence forces must continue to refrain from any involvement in the political situation and welcomes the restraint that they have shown in that regard. It also commends the calm shown by the people of Guinea-Bissau.

In the draft resolution, the Council commends the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and all other stakeholders seeking to find a way out of the crisis, in particular the current Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Mr. Alpha Condé, in his capacity as ECOWAS Mediator for Guinea-Bissau and President of the African Union; the Special Representative and Head of the African Union Liaison Office in Guinea-Bissau, Ovídio Pequeno; and other participants.

In that connection, the Council welcomes the adoption by ECOWAS on 10 September 2016 of the six-point road map it brokered for overcoming the crisis in Guinea-Bissau, and the Conakry Agreement on the road map's implementation. In the draft resolution, the Council urges all political stakeholders to put the country's interests first and thereby respect the road map and the Conakry Agreement.

With today's draft resolution, the Security Council also welcomes the contribution of the ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB) to ensuring stability in Guinea-Bissau and urges ECOWAS to extend the Mission's mandate. To that end, the Council asks the bilateral, regional and international partners to consider providing major support to ECOWAS in order to enable it to maintain ECOMIB. The Council also commends the European Union for its major financial support to the Mission and welcomes its willingness to consider options for providing further support.

In view of all of this, the Senegal delegation urges the Security Council and its bilateral, regional and international partners to remain engaged in helping Guinea-Bissau to overcome its political impasse, whose

main victims continue to be the people of Guinea-Bissau.

The President: The Security Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2343 (2017).

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7891

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7891st meeting

Monday, 27 February 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Arancibia Fernández
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mrs. Gueguen Mohsen
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skau
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2017/95/Rev.1)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-05153 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (S/2017/95/Rev.1)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Serbia to participate in this meeting.

I request the protocol officer to escort His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, to his seat at the Council table.

Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President: On behalf of the Security Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Vlora Çitaku to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/95/Rev.1, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Tanin.

Mr. Tanin: Before I begin my remarks on the situation in Kosovo, I would like to convey my profound sadness over the passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin of the Russian Federation, and to express my sincere condolences to his wife, his family and the Government of the Russian Federation on having lost one of his country's greatest diplomats. We will miss him in the Council.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/95/Rev.1), the past few months in Kosovo have been characterized by inconsistent progress as well as heightened tension between Belgrade and Pristina, including a reciprocal series of reactions and counter-reactions, accompanied at times by threatening and bellicose rhetoric. These events and political posturing reduce space for progress within the top-level political dialogue — a process that remains as fragile as it is essential and irreplaceable.

During my recent discussions in Pristina and Belgrade, each side naturally expressed differing perceptions of the reasons behind the reduced quality of communications and relations, and in general accused one another of having engaged in intentional provocations. Pristina leaders perceive various actions and words from Belgrade as being calculated to undermine the objectives of the Pristina Government, particularly as regards its outreach efforts towards the northern Serb-majority municipalities. Belgrade leaders perceive the actions and words of Pristina as attempts to sidestep processes based in the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU) and create new realities on the ground.

Irrespective of the divergent perceptions and interpretations, the facts were that a succession of events, detailed in the Secretary-General's report, combined to undermine trust, to inhibit the space for productive dialogue, and to push the situation uncomfortably close to renewed instability and confrontation. I should note that, since the issuance of the report, several other significant developments have taken place, including some more constructive ones.

At the beginning of this month, partially as a response to an escalating situation, Belgrade and Pristina leaders finally met at the highest political level in Brussels, under the auspices of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. This meeting was an essential step to chart a path out of a deteriorating situation and to publicly reconfirm their commitment to working together. A few days later, after close consultations led by the EU Special Representative and involving various other diplomatic partners, the Mayor of North Mitrovica and the Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Kosovo signed an agreement to remove the wall that had previously been constructed as part of the bridge redevelopment plan near the northern end of the Mitrovica bridge. It was removed without incident

on 5 February, and construction subsequently began on a newly agreed park space plan that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders.

Most recently, Pristina has renewed calls for the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into the Kosovo armed forces, including through the adoption of a resolution in the Assembly of Kosovo. This initiative remains opposed by the Kosovo Serbs and Belgrade, with reference to resolution 1244 (1999), emphasizing the exclusive role and authorities of the international security presence, the Kosovo Force (KFOR).

In the short term, the effects of the recent stresses in Kosovo still reverberate. Trust and confidence among Kosovo Serbs and Albanians have been affected; they will take time to rebuild. Nonetheless, with the restarting of the top-level dialogue, there are signs that work is again happening towards this goal. Discussing the details involved in implementing the future association/community of Serb-majority municipalities will certainly help the Kosovo Serbs to re-engage with the range of Government activities from which they have unfortunately removed themselves over the past three months. As seen in the past, one-sided approaches or steps aimed at resolving issues that affect both sides, and indeed overall progress in the normalization process, are more likely to lead to confrontation than to positive results in the direction desired by those who contemplate such steps.

There is no alternative to dialogue. The international prescriptions set forth to Pristina and Belgrade are categorical imperatives: non-confrontation, resolving issues through dialogue, and placing the objective improvement of the lives of people ahead of more limited and parochial calculations. I hope that the Council will help to hold leaders to their words that they will maintain a sincere and consistent commitment to dialogue and the full implementation of all the agreements already reached, and avoid making statements or undertaking activities that undermine its potential and put at risk all the benefits it is designed to bring to the population: security, prosperity and peace.

Kosovo's institutions continue to face daunting challenges to delivering as their leaders might wish. Political infighting persists. Disputes between the Government and opposition remain acrimonious. Disputes between the governing parties are also visible, as is dissent within governing parties. Major stakeholders feel pressure to position themselves for the electoral cycles, too often at the expense of time and energy that can be devoted to governance. Belgrade is also engaged in a political campaign surrounding the presidential elections in April. It is paramount to ensure that electoral politics do not disrupt vital processes and the kind of progress that is built up only with sustained time and effort, beyond the fluctuations of political seasons. The normalization of relations, reconciliation and justice all belong to that broader horizon.

Success in the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina is interlinked with long-term and sustainable societal reconciliation among Kosovo's communities. Courageous leadership and positive actions are important to promoting changes in attitudes. We recognize and appreciate a number of significant steps taken by some leaders, and encourage more sustained efforts to move beyond the past and to focus on the future.

Along with all my international colleagues in Kosovo, I took careful note of the recently announced initiative to explore the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission as one additional mechanism to open internal dialogue between the communities in Kosovo. Any such initiative should be lauded and given as much support as needed to encourage success. It is also important to recall that such initiatives are parts of a greater whole; the EU-facilitated dialogue itself is also one part, as is the serious work under way to provide for the many victims of the conflict in Kosovo who still await justice. Among the most essential international principles and practices for conducting truth and reconciliation processes in the post-conflict setting are impartiality, independence, transparency, complementarity with other efforts, full consultation with and the participation of all stakeholders involved, and, ultimately, commitment to the due diligence and care required for such a sensitive process.

Concentrated work needs to continue in order to improve the social and economic situation in Kosovo. Addressing unemployment, making progress in the rule of law and fighting corruption remain central for all people in Kosovo. People who find little hope or prospects within society experience frustration and isolation. Many will gravitate to alternative paths, including those leading to religious radicalization and violent extremism. As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism remains real in Kosovo and throughout the region.

The professional work of Kosovo's security bodies continues, while better integration into regional and international approaches can greatly leverage these efforts. Through the current five-year plan coordinated by the Office of the Prime Minister, the authorities of Kosovo are also focusing on a holistic approach to the issue, including in the educational anddevelopmental spheres. That important work can also benefit from strong support and coordination with global efforts.

Coordinated responses and engagement during the recent period of increased tensions, notably involving the European Union, the Kosovo Force, UNMIK and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, among others, once again confirmed the importance of the ongoing international engagement in the maintenance of peace and stability in Kosovo and the region. Stability in Kosovo and the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrade are part of the broader effort to improve stability in the Western Balkans. Last week in the Security Council (see S/PV.7886), the Secretary-General highlighted the danger of instability in the Western Balkans region. Any tension or potential crisis between Belgrade and Pristina cannot be seen in isolation from the challenges that the region already faces. Good-neighbourly relations, dedication to a common future within a united European space and a commitment to human rights and the rule of law and resolving disputes only through the peaceful means of dialogue and compromise are essential for Kosovo, as they are for the entire region.

As I have reported to the Council over the past months, UNMIK has brought a newly calibrated focus to its work, providing applicable support where it is most suited and working to ensure that the parties, the EU-centred political process and all our international organizational partners benefit from well-coordinated and constant partnership on the ground. In doing so, we are grateful for the close support we receive from all members of the Council. I thank the Council most sincerely for the ongoing support.

The President: I thank Mr. Tanin for his briefing.

I wish to remind invited participants to limit their statements to no more than 10 minutes, in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. A red light will flash on the microphones when the 10-minute mark is reached.

I now give the floor to President Nikolić.

President Nikolić (*spoke in Serbian; English text provided by the delegation*): At the beginning of my statement, let me welcome Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and thank him for his overall commitment to the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) under resolution 1244 (1999). I also thank the members of this organ for the attention they give to this issue on a regular basis. I also take this opportunity to wish His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, every success in his future work.

It is with sadness and sorrow that I note that Ambassador Vitaly Churkin is not with us today sitting behind the nameplate of the Russian Federation. He was a diplomat who contributed through his indefatigable work not only to protecting the interests of his country but also to international diplomacy and the global political policies of our age. Serbia will forever be grateful to him for the understanding and support he extended over many years, as well as for the dedication and energy that epitomized his work in the Security Council.

I would like to point out once again the importance of convening regular quarterly meetings of the Security Council, at unchanged intervals, to discuss the present agenda item. This is an important contribution to transparency and openness and, equally relevant, it is the only way to create conditions for the unhindered implementation of UNMIK's mandate in Kosovo and Metohija. Also, these meetings lend support to the dialogue conducted between Belgrade and Pristina with the facilitation of the European Union (EU).

We fully agree with the observation in the report (S/2017/95/Rev.1) before us regarding the importance of ensuring that UNMIK is appropriately resourced to address current and emerging challenges, including fragile reconciliation and the evolving threat of violent extremism. It is evident that the United Nations Mission needs optimal, larger staffing and financial capabilities in order to address all the requirements of the implementation of its mandate.

There is no doubt that the Republic of Serbia is committed to resolving all outstanding issues through dialogue within a status-neutral framework. Only through such an approach will it be possible to bring about stabilization in the southern Serbian province and uphold Serbia's right, as a sovereign State, to

territorial integrity. Our primary goal was, is and will be to safeguard peace, stability and human lives. By responding determinedly to all the challenges, the Government institutions of the Republic of Serbia have been instrumental in easing the tensions in Kosovo and Metohija when they threatened to escalate. The message that I send to all extremists from this organ is that peaceful solutions have no alternative. Problems and outstanding issues must be solved through dialogue, and not by threats and the use of force.

The Republic of Serbia expects the international community to stand united in defence of this civilizational achievement. In that context, I would like to emphasize in particular the detrimental statements made in respect of a possible formation of an army of Kosovo. It would be a gross violation of resolution 1244 (1999) and, at the same time, present a new, serious threat to the efforts invested in stabilizing not only Kosovo and Metohija, but also the Western Balkans.

The Republic of Serbia will continue to pursue a responsible and peaceful policy and will provide no excuse to anybody to engage in escalation and violence. In the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, Serbia has sought to pave the way towards gradual normalization. For a genuine and implementable agreement, though, it is necessary that the other interlocutor be sincere too.

Serbia's proposals submitted within the dialogue have been constructive and realistic. Also, my country has been ready for compromises. All along, we have striven to find mutually acceptable solutions to for many complex issues. That approach by Serbia has not been reciprocated by the other side, which often stalls the implementation of commitments it has assumed by agreement and signature. Certain results have been achieved, but they are far from what is expected.

For its part — only one part, though — Serbia is firmly committed to the preservation of peace and the creation of conditions in which all residents of Kosovo and Metohija will be ensured security and respect for basic human rights. This is the place and opportunity for us to face the fact that the situation in Kosovo and Metohija is, as borne out by the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of UNMIK, different altogether.

Let me recall that more than 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to live in central Serbia, without any hope of ever returning home. Regrettably, such hope is not provided by the international presence either. Serbia is interested in protecting the lives and property of all the residents of the province and creating conditions for sustainable IDP returns. Yet all our commitments to the dialogue, agreed to by Belgrade and Pristina and facilitated by the European Union, are continually undercut by violations of agreements and aggressive acts of the authorities in Pristina. The aim is to provoke conflicts — from the ban on Serbian-language textbooks to the continuous attacks on Serbs and their property and the unlawful attempt at confiscating the Mining, Metallurgy and Chemical Combine at Trepca, to the latest instance of preventing a Belgrade train from entering Kosovo and Metohija, the gravest violation of the basic human rights and the freedom of movement.

Traffic connections among people in the twenty-first century cannot be considered a provocation against anyone; rather, they are an obligation of all civilized societies to ensure economic development and decent living conditions to its citizens. Let me point out in that regard that the initiative for the operation of a train on that route was not made by politicians, but by students of the only university in Kosovo and Metohija in which instruction is in Serbian. The request of over 10,000 young men and women for a better and more economical traffic connection with Belgrade and the rest of central Serbia was met by threats, the mining of the line and recourse to long guns and combat vehicles. Such an approach is in direct contravention of the spirit of the dialogue aimed at normalizing relations and poses a serious threat to peace and stability in the region.

They say that the train was carrying the message that Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia and that it was a provocation that they were ready to stop by the force of arms. There is not a single decision of the United Nations under which Kosovo and Metohija is not a constituent part of Serbia. For me, the real provocation is that all representatives of the provisional administration in Pristina continue to aver that Kosovo is an independent State. Would members justify the actions of Serbia, a State Member of the United Nations, if it responded to that provocation with the threat of arms?

I am sure that members share my concern at the dispatch, short of the mandatory agreement of the local Serbian community, of the ethnically pure special police units, armed with offensive weapons, to the north of Kosovo and Metohija, populated by and large by Serbs still harbouring a vivid memory of the wave of organized ethnic cleansing in March 2004. In that wave, let me recall, Serbs were expelled from almost all cities

and towns in Kosovo and Metohija. The deployment of special police units is absolutely unacceptable and represents a call to armed conflict. Ask them what orders they had in case the train full of students were to appear at the administrative crossing. They did not know how to answer me at a meeting in Brussels in the presence of Ms. Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Perhaps they will tell the Council. Perhaps they will tell the Council, as there are many here who support their behaviour, which was a direct threat to civilian lives.

The manifestation of the institutional intention to use violence against peace-loving students — members of non-Albanian communities — was also a serious threat to peace in a volatile security situation in Kosovo and Metohija. Just as it has on many previous occasions, the Republic of Serbia also reacted reasonably and responsibly on that occasion, taking decisions and conveying messages whose only goal was to preserve peace and whatever level of stability existed in the region and to eliminate the danger posed to the lives of the remaining non-Albanian population in the province. In no way has Serbia ever provided any pretext to Albanian extremists, yet they continue to employ every asset to provoke conflict on a larger scale. That bona fide compromise-based approach of ours is also reflected in the 4 February agreement on the landscaping of part of the area near the bridge in Kosciuszko and Mitrovica.

Almost four years have elapsed since the signing of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations. A key segment of the agreement, agreed and signed, relates to the establishment of the association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo. Unfortunately, it has not been started yet. Pristina representatives are sending ever more open messages that they are not interested in the community and that they will not honour the agreement guaranteed by the EU. The obstinacy of the Pristina negotiators will not be checked by a few public criticisms of Pristina made in the West en passant.

Serbia demands that Pristina honour the agreement reached four years ago, nothing more, nothing less. Serbia also expects to hear the united and powerful voice of the international community, including that of our partners from the European Union, against the callous position held by Pristina on this issue of vital importance to the Serbs. What is the use of agreements reached and obligations assumed if they are not implemented?

The establishment of the association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo is a precondition for the normal life and sustainable survival of the Serbian people in the province; it provides for systemic, institutional protection of guaranteed human rights. As such, it also deserves to be accorded much greater attention in the reports of the Secretary-General, whose task it is to protect basic human rights, primarily the right to life, freedom of movement, housing, the right to work and education, the right to the preservation of the cultural uniqueness of a people and the freedom of religion.

Serbia confers by agreement all those rights on the Provisional Institutions in Pristina. Under the Brussels Agreement, Pristina has to confer all such rights on the association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo, the institution that is to implement them within the non-Albanian and, especially, Serbian populations in Kosovo and Metohija, in municipalities in which they constitute the majority. The association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo was entrusted the task of establishing the rule of law and human freedoms for the Serbs through the institutions of the system.

It is also in that context that Serbia views the importance of convening regular meetings of the Security Council from which messages are sent to either side, especially to Pristina, that agreements are not, and cannot be, just a dead letter and that, instead, they must be achieved in practice and enforced. Four years is more than sufficient time. Procrastination and excuses must no longer be taken lightly. The establishment and the commencement of the work of the association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo is of primary importance. The dynamics must be defined and the date on which the management team will commence work must be determined, while the community is to be based exclusively on what has been agreed and not on some subsequent attempts to unilaterally change the agreements that have already been reached with facilitation by the EU.

The establishment of the association/community of Serb municipalities in Kosovo, with substantive powers provided for by the Brussels Agreement and by accompanying agreements, rather than with the competencies of a non-governmental organization, is also necessary in order to prevent a further escalation

of mistrust. Anything else would amount to the flouting of commitments that have already been made and would render the very dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina meaningless.

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija continues to be characterized by a continued lack of physical and legal safety for the Serbs and all other non-Albanians, especially for IDPs, either who have returned or are willing to return to their previous homes. The padlocks on the Church of Christ the Saviour in Pristina symbolize the intolerance of, and the attitude towards, non-Albanian communities, especially the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Behind that unambiguous anti-civilizational act is the resolve to erase all traces of the existence of the Serbian people and their culture from a city in which more than 50,000 Serbs lived until 1999. The international community must not allow the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Serbs and other non-Albanians from Pristina to be carried out symbolically by the violent acts of usurpation of this holy site. Every effort to create at least an illusion of a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo and Metohija is rendered meaningless in that way. The Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija are therefore sent an abundantly clear message that their centuries-long history, culture and religion are unwelcome.

In their fictitious endeavours to protect the Serbian cultural and religious heritage, Pristina resorts to double talk — as historical, cultural and religious heritage is not protected from the desecration, arson and destruction of the centuries-long Christian heritage that belongs not only to the Serbs, but also to the medieval memory of humankind. A truly democratic society cannot be developed in an atmosphere in which the crimes committed against the Serbs and other non-Albanians, their property and historical, cultural and religious heritage and identity go unpunished. That is also becoming increasingly clear to those countries that once supported the attempt by the authorities in Pristina to join UNESCO.

I emphasize that there can be no true reconciliation unless all crimes are tried. It is an obligation towards the families, who have the right to find out the truth about the fate of their loved ones. The Republic of Serbia has never called into question the need for all those who committed war crimes, irrespective of their ethnic identity, to be brought to justice, on the contrary. At the same time, in that regard, it is of the utmost importance not to resort to manipulation and abuse for political purposes, employed ever so often by the authorities in Pristina. This provides clear evidence of Pristina's lack of readiness to assume responsibility within its own ranks for war crimes. I point that out well aware of the upcoming commencement of the work of the Specialist Chambers, established to try the crimes committed in Kosovo and Metohija in connection with the assertions in the Dick Marty report on the trafficking in human organs of abducted Serbs, as well as other war crimes and crimes against humanity. Serbia also attaches great importance to the solution of the problem of missing persons, as a priority humanitarian question.

The French judiciary is to decide on the request to extradite Ramush Haradinaj to Serbia. He is accused of committing the gravest war crimes. In an attempt to flee justice, this brute, one of the commanders of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army, does not refrain even today from openly threatening Europe and the world with a new war and states that "Serbia will fare just as it did in 1999".

Allow me to take the Council back in just a couple of sentences to 1999, not through the stories of the people killed, innocent civilian victims and ruins, of the destruction and demolition during the aggression, which is not difficult for me to recall was carried out against a sovereign European State, without the approval of the Security Council and the United Nations. Instead, I shall advise of the consequences with which we live 18 years later and include facts also available to the World Health Organization. Science has established that, once the micro- and nano-particles of depleted uranium enter the body, they have heavy metal radioactive and toxic effects and, if they are sufficiently small, they pass through all corporal barriers, including the blood-brain barrier and the placenta, and can be found in all tissues and organs of a contaminated person, as well as in the intrauterine fetus.

Research conducted in 2004 by Gatti and Montanari reveals that if someone comes from a territory hit by missiles containing depleted uranium, one cannot exclude the presence of depleted uranium as a potential pathogen, even if there is no proof of its presence in that person's tissue. That is telling proof that nuclear arms, including those containing depleted uranium, are in fact by-products of civilization. They are an invisible, ideal killer and a means of mass transgenerational destruction, leading to lasting irriversible changes in all natural organisms, despite being the end result of state-of-the-art technology. The bombs containing depleted uranium that were dropped on Serbia 18

years ago are today damaging the ecosystem of the entire planet.

However, I leave that topic to be considered by us all to be an inseparable part of the Security Council's mission in the field of armament, the use of arms and the consequences to humankind's future survival on planet Earth. I do not know, therefore, why there was no strong condemnation of what I would refer to as clear threats made by Ramush Haradinaj. Impunity for the crimes committed must not be allowed or tolerated. It is a civilizational matter and a litmus test for the entire membership of the United Nations. It is an opportunity for us to demonstrate that law and justice are above politics and that all victims are equal in suffering.

Many incidents confirm that security in Kosovo and Metohija continues to be unstable and that there is a latent danger of escalating violence. I would reiterate that it is the returnees in the nationally mixed environments who are the most vulnerable. Accordingly, this question should be accorded greater attention in the reports of the Secretary-General.

Let me give a concrete example: between 1 October 2016 and 31 January 2017, that is, in the past four months alone, over 30 ethnically motivated attacks against Serbs and other non-Albanians have been recorded. Physical attacks were committed, attempts were made to prevent displaced persons from celebrating Christmas Eve in the Church of the Assumption of Holy Virgin Mary in Djakovica, the property of returnees was broken into and set on fire and the memorial plaque of the abducted Serbian journalists in the municipality of Orahovac was damaged once again. A bomb was planted near the Orthodox church in the Serbian part of Orahovac, an explosive device was found at the water-supply line in Kosovska Mitrovica, a school bus with children aboard was stoned on the road between Silovo and Koretiste — all of these instances evince the discrepancy between Pristina's formal pronouncements and the reality on the ground.

Is it not a clear cause for concern and reaction by the entire international community that Serbs continue to be prevented from visiting their churches and graveyards even during the major Christian holidays, such as Christmas? If the international community is not concerned and does not stop these prohibitions, it is sending a clear message that it approves Pristina's position that the Serbs are unwanted, that they will never be able to be the masters of their own destiny, that there are no conditions for their safe return, and that their lives — let alone their property and security — will never be safe.

The restitution of private property, which is one of the most frequent violations of human rights that internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija are facing, remains an unresolved problem. Over 40,000 requests for the restitution of illegally seized and usurped property have been submitted to the Kosovo Property Agency, which is under the control of Pristina. Out of the requests, some 97 per cent were submitted by Serbs and other non-Albanians, while approximately 18,000 lawsuits relative to compensation for property damage were filed in courts in the province.

It is therefore evident that the basic conditions for the sustainable return of the displaced are not present, with the lack of guarantees for the safety of persons and the protection of property, the absence of the rule of law and the widespread discrimination against and lack of respect for the non-Albanian population and their fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms. The number of returnees to Pristina continues to be discouragingly small, despite the fact that the creation of conditions conducive to an unhindered and long-term sustainable return is one of the main tasks of UNMIK's mandate.

It is clear that UNMIK carries out this part of its mission with difficulty, the key reason being the absence political will of the majority community and its unwavering intolerance of all other communities. For example, a declaration aadopted by the local Municipal Assembly in Suva Reka makes the return of internally displaced persons to Mušutište contingent upon the resolution of the question of missing persons and upon an apology by the Republic of Serbia and the Kosovar Serbs for crimes allegedly committed during the conflicts of 1999. Of no value at all are the Serbs' title deeds proving ownership of property or the right to live in houses they have inherited from their forefathers. Empty, too, are the Brussels Agreement and the UNMIK mandate.

No one reacts to such wilful acts or the denial of all rights to Serbian returnees. Failure to react to such incidents is a form of tacit acceptance of, or even the support for, the continuation of such practices, which is neither in the spirit of Security Council resolutions nor any other United Nations instruments and declarations, in clear violation of the spirit of law and justice. We

therefore request that the question of minority rights be accorded greater attention in the reports of the Secretary-General on the work of UNMIK.

It is evident that systemic, legal, administrative, institutional and political threats to the human rights of the non-Albanian communities are widespread in Kosovo and Metohija. Systemic double standards in which members of non-Albanian communities have to face numerous obstacles when trying to exercise their rights — the most basic right to live without fear of physical violence, the right to see perpetrators punished, the right to return and stay in the place of return, the right to employment and the right for children to receive an education, the right to health protection, property rights and religious rights — are the rule. As long as crimes go unpunished and as long as the authorities in Pristina carry out their designs without consequences and fail to implement the provisions of the Brussels Agreement, a dignified life in a multi-ethnic community will not be possible. In that regard, I note the responsibility of the United Nations.

In a word, it must not be allowed that the questions of essential importance for a normal and dignified life of Serbs and the members of other non-Albanian communities be submerged in general statistics without regard to the ethnic component that underlies all the problems in Kosovo and Metohija. That path cannot be acceptable when it is construed as proof of readiness to accept the existing conditions without the intention of making any substantial changes, proceeding from the fact that enclaves have their own distinctive problems and are worthy first and foremost of recognition by the State and of greater efforts towards resolving numerous everyday problems.

On this occasion, I would also like to reiterate that we consider it necessary to introduce a new section in the report with respect to northern Metohija, which would focus on the situation of the minority communities south of the Ibar River. Radicalization of the political climate and the strengthening of the political, ethnic and religious intolerance amplify the instability of the security situation in Kosovo and Metohija.

A drastic increase in religious extremism, with elements of terrorism, is evident in the province, as are activities by radicalized extremists returning from the battlefields of the Middle East. At the same time as the political situation of Kosovar Albanians becomes more polarized, a trend towards further escalation is observable, with the constant threat of the Albanian electorate redirecting its discontent to the members of the non-Albanian communities, primarily the Serbs, which requires heightened attention from the international presence.

Guided by the interest of regional stability and a vision for a different life in the region, and truly dedicated to reconciliation, the rule of law and democratic values, the Republic of Serbia is firmly committed to maintaining the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, whose primary aim in the solution of everyday problems of the people living Kosovo and Metohija, with full respect for resolution 1244 (1999), which represents the basis and framework for the resolution of these issues. However, in order for the dialogue to be truly purposeful, it must be grounded in the genuine desire to resolve the problems on the basis of compromise, and it must not be abused as a platform for the imposition of the interests of one side alone, especially not for the purposes of promoting the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo, which the Republic of Serbia will never recognize.

The solution to the question of Kosovo and Metohija cannot be based on diktat and on the presentation of a fait accompli to the Republic of Serbia. The solution is only possible through dialogue and by solutions acceptable to all sides. The last thing we want is for the situation in Kosovo and Metohija to pose a constant threat to the stability and progress of both Serbia and the region, for which reason we shall continue our dedicated work on the process of normalization and responsibility and regardless of the increasingly frequent manifestations of the lack of constructiveness and the presence of harmful unilateral actions by the other side.

There are numerous examples of unilateral steps that Pristina has taken outside the agreements reached within the dialogue, such as the attempts to join international organizations. As a matter of fact, the dialogue provides for the resolution of all issues — all issues — through the dialogue between the two parties with the facilitation of the European Union. Detrimental is the habit of Pristina authorities to resort to unilateral actions, with the support of some major Powers, the sponsors of their attempts at independence, contrary to the Brussels dialogue as the agreed framework for resolving the outstanding issues. The continuity of this regrettable practice is evinced by Kosovo's efforts to join UNESCO, INTERPOL and other organizations, which unnecessarily disturbs the atmosphere in which the

dialogue takes place and which is keeping us back from what is supposed to be the primary goal for both sides, namely, the stabilization of the situation in the region and the quest for sustainable and mutually acceptable solutions. Serbia, for its part, honours agreements.

Five years ago, I decided to join the dialogue with the provisional authorities in Pristina in order to calm the tensions and, above all, ensure a normal and safe life for Serbs and the non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo and Metohija. Serbia's experiences in the dialogue have made me wonder if I did the right thing. Many forget that, historically, Kosovo and Metohija is the territory of Serbia, and not of the Albanians, who, according to the Ottoman census, did not even live in the territories in the fourteenth century.

It is forgotten that Kosovo Day, in which Kosovo as a Serbian land was celebrated in the United States some 99 years ago. On that occasion, President Woodrow Wilson sent a message of American goodwill towards Serbia and the Serbian people to the Serbian community of the United States. It is forgotten that the Serbs had founded their State on the territory of Kosovo in the Middle Ages, and that ever since the Serbian emperors and kings built their churches and monasteries there, most of which are inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites as Serbian heritage. Unfortunately, most of them are also now on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The question arises: In danger from whom? Certainly not from us, who seek to preserve our Christian heritage.

It is also forgotten that Kosovo was populated by Albanians most intensively only in the past two centuries, especially during the dictatorship of the Communist leader Enver Hoxha, from whom they fled Albania to Kosovo and Metohija and were received by Serbs in good faith as brothers. It is forgotten that a unilateral declaration of statehood means nothing if it is not the result of an agreement with the mother country and people. That this is right is confirmed by the constant pressure on Serbia to renounce its territory, the land where it established its statehood almost 10 centuries ago.

We shall not do that; no one else would. In the Council we have a guarantee in that certain permanent members respect international law and support the integrity and sovereignty of Serbia. We know that some countries recognized so-called Kosovo out of their own interests, but we also know that more than 70 per cent of humankind does not share this view.

Perhaps I am speaking to some of those present here in vain. We in Serbia say that it is futile to whisper to the deaf or to wink at the blind. Those who do not have such pain turn their backs on the pain of others. I would never wish your children to live in the conditions in which Serbian children in Kosovo and Metohija do. I would not, because I believe in the right of a child to grow up in peace, the parents' right to raise that child in peace, and people's right to live out their life, come the time, in the home of their ancestors. I would not, because I believe in God.

I would like to be clear once again: Serbia will not recognize Kosovo, whatever we might be offered in return and whatever pressures we may be subjected to. This has everything to do with the defence of principles and a permanent adherence to justice. Those who adhere to principles and fight for justice are always right.

On behalf of the citizens of Serbia, I would like to thank all of the countries that respect international law and support our position. The political leaders of Pristina should be aware of all of this so as finally to be able to embark on reasonable negotiations and to keep the promises they have made, just as their ancestors did.

On this occasion, I call on those States that have not recognized the unilaterally declared independence of Kosovo to resist the shameless pressure brought to bear by the powerful and to remain true to their principled respect for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the supreme authority of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. I call on those States that have recognized Kosovo to reconsider their decision and thereby contribute to efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions.

Serbia is ready for agreements, but not for blackmail. It is ready for talks, but not for ultimatums or unilateral solutions. It is ready for the substantial autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija, but never for an independent State of Kosovo. And it is ready, in a context of substantial autonomy, to guarantee all rights to national communities, rights that, in the context of Serbian laws and everyday life, exceed by far the standards of most countries.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Çitaku.

Ms. Çitaku: Before I read out my remarks, I wish to stress that I will abide by the 10-minute time limit that you, Sir, proposed, out of respect for your time as President and out of respect for the members of the Security Council.

Secondly, allow me to convey our deep condolences in connection with the passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin. We disagreed on almost everything, but we appreciate his role and contribution.

Ten days ago, Kosovo celebrated the ninth anniversary of its independence. We all remember vividly that cold day in Pristina: the emotions, expectations and dreams. All the suffering that Kosovars were subjected to, the years of discrimination, exclusion, mass killings, ethnic cleansing, rape and deportation, did not deter us from pursuing our destiny. We persevered, and we succeeded. The lessons of Kosovo are quite simple; you can win if you are right and if the cause is just, even if you are not the powerful one.

Furthermore, humankind is capable of miracles. When there is solidarity among the free nations of the world, life prevails over death and good prevails over evil. We will forever be grateful for the role the Council has played, but the time has come to move on. Coming here every three months, taking up the Council's valuable time and hearing the same old stories represents an unjustified use of the Council's valuable time. Spending millions to maintain a mission in Kosovo that no longer has a function or purpose is an unjustified expenditure of United Nations resources given that we know very well that they could be put to much better use.

Frankly, I will not go through every topic mentioned in the relevant report of the Special Representative. If United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo criteria were used also to write reports about the countries of the representatives sitting around this table, trust me, many reports would have to be produced.

I will just mention briefly several issues. First, with respect to the incident that took place in the city of Gjakova, what the report failed to mention is that in 1998-1999, 1,665 civilians were killed in that city. That is 13 per cent of the entire population. In the village of Mejë alone, 373 civilians were killed in less than an hour. Three thousand women were raped. Hundreds went missing. Houses, schools and religious sites were destroyed. Yet the mayor of Gjakova, Ms. Mimoza Kusari, has been working hard to accommodate minority communities in her municipality.

For the record, the municipality has invested in the reconstruction of the Serbian Orthodox church there. The church does not pay for any utilities; the municipality covers all costs. Moreover, the municipality has invested in a small farm on the premises of the church in order to be even more accommodating to the people who are living and serving there. The Orthodox Church in Gjakova was never attacked, and there is good cooperation. The incident to which the report refers has to do with a very specific situation, that of people who were involved in war crimes coming to visit the site. This is the whole story. The context is everything, and often the reports of the Special Representative fail to provide that. While we heard from my Serbian counterpart about a parallel universe, let me please tell the Council what is happening in the real world.

First, Kosovo is a free, independent and sovereign State recognized by the overwhelming majority of the free nations of the world. Just today, Bangladesh recognized the Republic of Kosovo, and we wish to thank its Government and its people. We wish also to thank the people and the Government of Singapore, which recognized Kosovo previously, in December. It is very clear that this process is unstoppable.

Kosovo is a member of more than 50 regional and international organizations and on a clear path towards becoming a member of the European Union, and soon, hopefully, a Member of the United Nations. The legitimacy of our cause was sealed by the crystal-clear ruling of the International Court of Justice. The Court ruled that States exists for the population, not vice versa, thereby confirming without any ambiguity that we did not break any international law when we declared our independence.

Secondly, just because Serbia refuses to accept us as a State does not make us any less of a State. That only signifies that Serbia is a neighbour that remains hostage to its own hegemonic and neo-colonial past. Its attitude is clearly demonstrated by the abuse of the issuance of an INTERPOL red notice, as we recently witnessed in the case of the detention of the former Prime Minister of Kosovo, Mr. Ramush Haradinaj. Mr. Haradinaj was twice acquitted at The Hague tribunal, and we have absolutely no doubt that the justice system in France will function professionally and release him. That is long overdue.

This is not justice. This is not prosecution. This is persecution. Furthermore, this is a desperate act by Serbia to reverse history. As a reminder to everyone, Serbia conducted and levelled similar trials and charges against all Western leaders in 2000, including Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schröder and Javier Solana, among others. We have no doubt that this Kafkaesque process will end soon and that Mr. Haradinaj will return to Kosovo where he belongs, but the really disturbing element in all of this drama is Serbia's failure to deal with its own past — with the real and not the fictional crimes that were committed in Kosovo during the war.

Just last month, the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade published a shiver-inducing report substantiated by facts and figures of unprecedented measures that Serbia undertook to hide traces of war crimes, going so far as building structures on top of the mass graves. According to Serbian logic, Churchill, De Gaulle, Roosevelt and Eisenhower should have faced the Nuremberg trials — not the Nazis. Let us imagine just for one second those thousands of families in Kosovo who are demanding answers and a proper burial for their loved ones. Instead of finding the strength to deal with their own past, catharsis and de-Nazification, Serbia has chosen the path of denial. Zero is the number of Serbians charged or convicted for war crimes committed in Kosovo. Instead, they are being promoted to high-level positions, such as in the case of General Diković, the current Chief of Staff of the Serbian Armed Forces, who, as has been documented, is responsible for the killing of 1,400 civilians.

The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is and was not a terrorist organization. The KLA has been the most successful liberation movement in recent history.

What we face on an almost daily basis from Serbia are one-sided provocations aimed at destabilizing Kosovo. There is a train service that runs twice daily between Kosovo and Serbia. People commute from one side of the border to the other. There was never a problem, until one day in mid-January when Serbia decided to send a train fully-loaded with hatred to Kosovo covered with the slogan "Kosovo is Serbia" translated into 21 languages, including Albanian.

Now, really, does anyone have any idea of what Serbia thinking? Would any Council member sitting around this table allow the same thing to happen in his or her country? Kosovo, of course, took measures to stop the train, and after seeing our resolve, just before it reached the border, Serbia decided to stop the train. Frankly speaking, there is no reason to praise Serbia for doing that. It is playing the roles of both pyromaniac and fireman. It should not be rewarded for fixing a problem that it created in the first place. We experienced a similar situation with regard to the wall that was built in the centre of the city of Mitrovica and later removed by those who put it there in the first place. Those kinds of games should end.

Serbs living in Kosovo should not be held hostage by Serbia and played as pawns in order to create leverage. They should be masters of their own lives. Kosovo institutions have gone to great lengths to accommodate their needs. Unprecedented legislative and constitutional measures have been put in place in order to make sure that their rights are guaranteed. We will, in accordance with our Constitution, implement all the agreements that we reached in Brussels. We will establish the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities but only in accordance with our Constitution, without their having any legislative or executive power.

We will not allow Serbia to hold us back and hostage to its own troubling past. We understand that dealing with the past is sometimes more difficult for the perpetrator than for the victim. Questions need to be answered and, for some, that past is shameful. We will not discuss with Serbia or with anyone else the establishment and the creation of our own armed forces. That is a legitimate and a sovereign decision for the Kosovo authorities to make.

Although the President of Kosovo established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because we believe that every family and every victim, regardless of ethnicity, deserves truth and justice, what we heard from Serbian President in January was a call for war. Now, obviously, there will be no war — we all know how the last one ended — but in order to build sustainable peace, the absence of war is not enough. I should be clear that we in Kosovo will not be distracted. We know exactly who we are, and we know exactly what we want. We want peace, dialogue and reconciliation, but never submission.

Young, dedicated and selfless people in Kosovo are writing history and making us proud every day. These include Majlinda Kelmendi, who once again won the world judo championship, and Arta Dobroshi and Shpat

Deda, who collaborated with British producers and just brought home our first award from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.

In the real world, beyond politics and political turmoil, there is a Kosovo in which youngsters try hard, challenge the boundaries imposed by politics, dream big and never let us down. I would like to invite everyone here to come and visit, so that they can see with their own eyes what Kosovo looks like today.

The President: I thank Ms. Çitaku for her statement.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, and share the serious concerns he expressed about the situation in Kosovo. We thank Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and his team for their briefing on the work of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), highlighting that serious problems persist in the region. Many of those problems, however, have been urgently awaiting solutions for years. We categorically refuse to accept the practice of directing unilateral and offensive insults at Serbia and its people. One should first cast out the beam from one's own eye.

The report of the Secretary-General on the Mission in Kosovo (S/2017/95/Rev.1) is generally objective and deserves to be commended. It and Mr. Tanin's briefing this morning reflect the growing level of tension between the parties and the presence in the region of outstanding issues, most of them in key areas, particularly those relating to the protection of the political, economic, social and religious rights of the Serb community. It is becoming clear why the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, which has already been in a prolonged deadlock, is in danger of breaking down. That is primarily the result of the biased attitude of the European Union, which, as intermediary, has not exerted the proper degree of influence on the Kosovo-Albanian side regarding implementation of the agreements. Above all, what is at issue is the fundamental question of the establishment of an association/community of Serb-majority municipalities of Kosovo, which, we must not forget, is a key point of the agreement of 19 April 2013 on the principles of the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. There has been plenty of discussion and many pronouncements about national reconciliation and the creation of a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo, but no sign whatever of practical steps to achieve those things.

We also categorically refuse to accept the attempt to distance Belgrade from the process of resolving some of the most important issues surrounding the protection of the lives of the Kosovo's Serbian community. No one — neither Serbia nor Serbs living in Kosovo — will ever accept that. Many members of the international community will not accept it. We are disturbed at the lack of an appropriate reaction among the international community to Pristina's ongoing attempts to wrest away economic assets that belong to Serbs, including the Trepča industrial complex and major electric power facilities. During the recent exacerbation of tensions, not even feeble attempts were made to urge Kosovars to comply with the sensitive agreements. On the contrary, it is always the Serbs who are leaned on from the other side, time after time.

We note Belgrade's constructive attitude. On 5 February, the Serbs began to dismantle the walls around a pedestrian zone in North Mitrovica, something that, let us not forget, the Pristina authorities had insisted on. Serbia fulfilled its obligations regarding the International Telecommunication Union's establishment of a separate telephone code for Kosovo. Thanks to Belgrade's restrained position, an escalation of conflict was avoided when, on 14 January, heavily armed units of Kosovo-Albanian police invaded Serb-populated areas of Kosovo in order to prevent the resumption of train service between Belgrade and North Mitrovica; this unprovoked measure was a gross violation of the current agreement on freedom of movement across the administrative boundary line. Pristina should have no security forces in northern Kosovo, where the Serbian population lives. That is a key element of the agreements.

The dialogue's effectiveness is undermined by the fact that some countries that pay lip service to the idea of dialogue are playing a double game. They encourage the unilateral attitude in Kosovo to applications for membership in international bodies, prompting other States to recognize Kosovan sovereignty. The renewed declarations by Pristina of its intention to seek membership in the Council of Europe, INTERPOL and UNESCO are nothing but open provocations. Incidents, including some involving physical violence towards non-Albanian nationalists, continue to

occur. Stone-throwing at buses carrying Serbian schoolchildren and Orthodox Christian pilgrims is commonplace. Kosovo's law enforcement bodies react extremely sluggishly, and in most cases the perpetrators are never found. All of this creates obstacles to the already almost paralysed process for returning refugees to the region.

On 4 January, we noted the arrest in France, at the request of Serbia, of Ramush Haradinaj, the leader of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo and former Kosovo Liberation Army insurgent. We await the completion of all the formalities necessary to enable the launching of a special investigation into the Kosovo Liberation Army's crimes as soon as possible. If the perpetrators are not brought to justice, regardless of the positions they may currently occupy, it will be impossible to achieve national reconciliation or a comprehensive settlement.

We consider enabling the creation of a Kosovo-Albanian armed force on territory under a United Nations mandate unacceptable. Such an act contravenes resolution 1244 (1999), which supports the presence on Kosovo's territory of a multinational force under international control, exclusively. When dealing with any issues related to Kosovo security forces, the views of Serbia and Kosovo Serbs must be taken into account. As long as we are talking about national reconciliation and a multi-ethnic society, those views must be taken into consideration. One indisputable priority should be ensuring the security of the Kosovo Serb community, for which the Kosovo-Albanian authorities and international organizations in the region are responsible, particularly the Kosovo Force, whose mandate includes relevant provisions in that regard.

Serious issues regarding the protection of Serbian religious and cultural heritage continue. The Serbian Orthodox Church is encountering obstacles in gaining access to religious sites, which they need to be able to do, among other things, in order to put them back in order in the wake of acts of vandalism. The Kosovo authorities have long prevented the completion of the construction of the church of Christ the Saviour in Pristina, and now they have also blocked the reconstruction of the church of Saint Nicholas in the Holy Archangels Monastery in Prizren by refusing building permission to the Serbian Orthodox Church. This very typical act does not jibe with Kosovo's professed desire to become a member of UNESCO.

The task of countering the spread of Islamic radicalism and terrorism in Kosovo has lost none of its urgency. It is a worrying fact that the region is used for recruiting insurgents to fight with extremists in the Middle East and to prepare acts of terrorism in other countries. Incidentally, major Western publications often feature reporting on the subject of the fact that when these insurgents get done fighting and return home they create the problem of what to do with them.

Given the current situation, we see no grounds for reviewing the Security Council's quarterly consideration of the question of Kosovo. On the contrary, the regional dynamics require us to intensify our attention to the situation in Kosovo, and any talk of reducing the level of the United Nations presence in the region provided by UNMIK, under the leadership of Ambassador Tanin, is inappropriate. There can be no doubt that he is playing a key role in the situation in Kosovo, or that UNMIK remains the central instrument for international monitoring and contributes to normalizing the situation, in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999) — which remains in force in its entirety. The resolution cannot be changed unilaterally. That is an absolute political taboo.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, for his presence and participation here today. At the same time, I would like to thank Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his informative briefing.

One of the main principles of the foreign policy of Uruguay is respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. In exercising their sovereignty, States are free to alter their borders, provided that it is in keeping with international law and done through peaceful means and agreements that have been freely consented to. Uruguay takes this opportunity to reaffirm compliance with resolution 1244 (1999), adopted by the Security Council.

We express our concern about reference in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/95/Rev.1) to the fact that tensions between Belgrade and Pristina have reached worrying levels. Uruguay calls for a committed dialogue that would lead to stability in the region, as well as progress and an improvement in the situation of the people living in the area. I hope that

the high-level meetings that took place in January and early February within the framework of the Belgrade dialogue, facilitated by the European Union, will yield positive results in order to reduce the tension that arose during the period covered by the report.

The topic of human rights should be at the centre of any reconciliation process. In order to lay the foundation for the future, we must heal the wounds of the past. In that respect, it is crucial to clarify the situation of all missing persons. Also crucial to the reconciliation process is resolving the situation of the internally displaced persons and guaranteeing conditions for their safe return.

Another fundamental aspect that I would like to point out is the question of migrants. In that respect, considering the special circumstances in the Balkans as a route for migrants, I would like to stress the necessity of protecting the rights of migrants and refugees. We therefore welcome the statement by the Secretary-General that asylum seekers in the zone have been dealt with in accordance with international humanitarian law.

I would like to acknowledge the important work that is done on the ground by UNMIK, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force, which are acting in accordance with resolution 1244 (1999). I would also like to highlight the recent campaign carried out by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on the protection of journalists in Kosovo with a view to promoting the freedom of the press and ending the insecurity those professionals often face, as well as the impunity enjoyed by their attackers.

There are many areas where we are seeing progress, and there are many that still require work. However, with the commitment of political leaders and both communities and with the support of the Council and the international system, it will be possible to achieve peace and security in a stable environment in which the communities can coexist peacefully.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Zahir Tanin, for his detailed update on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). We also welcome the presence of the President of Serbia, Mr. Nikolić, and recognize the presence of Ambassador Çitaku.

We welcome the detailed report (S/2017/95/Rev.1) presented by the Secretary-General on the situation in Kosovo and on the activities of UNMIK. That should actually be the main purpose of our meeting today. We want to stress that the report highlights some progress as well as some critical issues, and clearly depicts a situation that continues to remain fragile due to internal political problems, as well as to an overall deterioration of relations among western Balkan countries.

We are very concerned by the rising tensions in recent weeks, leading to the use of heated rhetoric and hampering the improvement of relations between the two sides. We call on both Belgrade and Pristina to abstain from inflammatory statements and backward-looking language. In that regard, I would like to emphasize our strong support to the normalization of their relations and encourage them to constructively advance the dialogue facilitated by the European Union (EU). We commend the effort of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms. Federica Mogherini, to convene at the highest level the latest rounds of the dialogue in Brussels on 24 January and 1 February, where the parties agreed to defuse tensions, refrain from unilateral acts and continue to work together.

Remarkable progress has already been achieved with important steps forward in the areas of integration of the judiciary, freedom of movement and telecommunications. But much remains to be done to implement the agreements already reached. We strongly encourage Belgrade and Pristina to work in that direction and to find pragmatic and mutually acceptable solutions to the advantage of both communities, starting with the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

The normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina will have a crucial impact on regional equilibrium. Allow me to underscore once again that key to the path towards the European Union is durable peace, stability and prosperity in the western Balkans, which are inherently linked to progress in the EU-facilitated dialogue. Losing momentum now could open the way to a counterproductive backlash, to the detriment of both parties and the entire region. Our support of this process is unwavering at both the bilateral level and in multilateral forums.

We stand at the front line to assist in the consolidation of Kosovo authorities and to improve local ownership, as seen in our long-standing contribution to UNMIK, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the Kosovo Force. In that vein, we welcome the entry into force of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union. At this point, it is of primary importance that Pristina step up efforts in the fight against corruption and organized crime, and that it ratify the border agreement with Montenegro. Effective reconciliation is at the foundation of any democratic and functional society. We welcome the results achieved so far, with the assistance of EULEX, in the rule of law and justice sector, and we look forward to the time when the Kosovo Specialist Chambers are fully operational.

I have two other main messages. First of all, international assistance to Kosovo must be based on the principles of sustainability and ownership. At present, given the volatile situation highlighted by the Secretary-General in his report, including the threat of violent extremism, we acknowledge his view on the current adequate configuration of UNMIK, and we support its role in facilitating dialogue and reconciliation at the community level. Nonetheless, we stand ready to discuss a reconfiguration of the Mission according to the evolution of the situation on the ground and that is consistent with the overall reform of peacekeeping operations. We look forward to the recommendations of the Secretary-General in that regard.

Secondly, we emphasize the pivotal role of the European Union in the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, and call on both to send out a message of détente and constructive commitment to the European Union-facilitated dialogue, for the sake of their own populations and the stability of the entire region. We attach primary importance to the regional dimension. Boosting integration in the western Balkans is crucial to bringing them closer to Europe while improving their resilience to emerging threats and triggering their development potential.

As Chair of the Berlin process in 2017, which will culminate with the western Balkans summit in Trieste on 12 July, we focus on economic growth, infrastructure, interconnectivity, innovation, youth and the rule of law. In these priority areas, shared with the European Union and at the core of its cooperation with western Balkans countries, we are engaging all actors in an inclusive dialogue. We encourage all of them to actively participate, beginning with the implementation of soft measures on cooperation with neighbours, which are essential if the process is to be fruitful.

Within the framework of the Berlin process, we will also provide assistance to the adoption of reforms against organized crime and corruption by promoting the development of a network of anti-corruption agencies to strengthen Governments' capacity in confronting the phenomenon at the regional level.

Mr. Klein (United States of America): I thank Special Representative Tanin for his update on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

We appreciate the United Nations efforts over the years to help Kosovo build multi-ethnic, democratic institutions that uphold the rule of law and respect human rights. We are pleased that these efforts have largely been accomplished. However, even given those accomplishments and the requests of several Council members during our briefing in November (see S/PV.7811) for the United Nations to seriously reconsider UNMIK's resources, we were surprised that the report of the Secretary-General notes the "importance of ensuring that UNMIK is appropriately resourced to address current and emerging challenges" (*S/2017/95/Rev.1, para. 41*).

We believe that UNMIK is overresourced and overstaffed incomparison with its limited responsibilities. Last year, UNMIK had high levels of underspent funds in its budget. The Mission should return such resources to United Nations Headquarters rather than create unnecessary projects. And yet UNMIK, a mission that should be drawing down, is putting permanent solar panels on a building that it is renting. Kosovo is a success story and UNMIK deserves a lot of credit, but it would be unfortunate for UNMIK to be remembered not for its brave work in supporting the establishment of a new country but for lingering past its relevance.

It is time for the Secretariat to downsize UNMIK's structure, size and tasks in line with realities on the ground. The situation in Kosovo is drastically different from what it was in 1999, when the Security Council created the Mission, or in 2008, when the Secretariat restructured it. We are aware of the frictions and provocations that have occurred over the past few months, but we also note that they have been resolved calmly, collaboratively and without violence.

Recent frictions highlight the importance of the efforts of Kosovo and Serbia to pursue the normalization of relations through the Brussels dialogue, facilitated by the European Union (EU). We appreciate the recent convening by EU High Representative Mogherini of both Kosovo's and Serbia's leaders at a high-level meeting. We continue to support the vital role of the EU as a facilitator of the dialogue. Leaders in Belgrade and Pristina must continue taking the needed steps and making the difficult but necessary decisions in order to progress in the talks. We call on both Belgrade and Pristina to fully implement dialogue agreements without further delay, and to work more actively towards the normalization of relations.

The United States reaffirms its support for Kosovo as it develops as a prosperous, peaceful and mult-ethnic democracy. A democratic, stable and independent Kosovo is a force for regional stability. We continue to strongly support full international recognition of Kosovo and Kosovo's membership in all relevant international organizations, including the United Nations. We encourage United Nations Member States that have not yet done so join the more than 100 Members that have already recognized Kosovo as an independent State.

The United States is pleased to see progress towards establishing the Kosovo specialist chambers, and we encourage Kosovo to continue its commitment to that body. Kosovo needs to make greater progress in strengthening the independence of its judiciary and improving the rule of law to combat corruption, attract foreign investment and accelerate its overall development.

Finally, we again strongly urge the Council to adjust the reporting and briefing period for UNMIK from three months to six. That longer reporting period would reduce the burden on the Secretariat and the Council, both of which have far more pressing business at hand.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I thank Special Representative Tanin for his briefing.

Let me start by welcoming President Nikolić and Ambassador Çitaku to the Council today.

In the interests of keeping this meeting to time, and noting that we have many pressing issues to discuss in the Council, I shall keep my remarks brief this morning.

Like so many others here, the United Kingdom is committed to the stability and security of the western Balkans. A central part of that is our full support for the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia and the prosperity and stability that normalization would bring for both their peoples. Since we last met on this issue (see S/PV.7811), there have been many positive steps made by Kosovo towards that goal. The economy is growing and some steps have been taken to deal with corruption, including with support from the United Kingdom Government, although there is still more to do. Kosovo has secured its own international dialling code, as well as recognition from Singapore and, just this morning, from Bangladesh, as Ambassador Çitaku has already mentioned.

I would also like to note the success of the British-Kosovo film *Home*, which won the award for best short film from the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. It is Kosovo's first. Following the Oscar nomination of *Shock* last year, it is clear that Kosovo's cultural sector is going from strength to strength.

But in light of the continued progress in Kosovo, we cannot help but be concerned by the heightened tension between Serbia and Kosovo over the reporting period. At a time when both countries should be looking towards a prosperous future, we instead find ourselves here today discussing provocative acts that belong firmly in the past. At the heart of so many of these issues — whether the inflammatory train incident or the illegal wall in Mitrovica — lie narrow-minded politics and electioneering. Stirring up nationalist sentiments to advance short-term political agendas not only enflames tensions, but also distracts from the many more important issues that Kosovo and Serbia need to deal with, most particularly the implementation of important dialogue agreements.

We welcome the intense engagement of High Representative Mogherini and the European External Action Service to help bring about a resolution of those disputes. I should like to highlight specifically the excellent cooperation between the Government of Kosovo and the Kosovo-Serb Mayor of North Mitrovica on the wall issue. Such cooperation shows that, at the local level, people want to work together to improve their lives rather than be drawn into political squabbles. It is that spirit that we all should channel here in the Security Council. It is a spirit of integration and cooperation, not division. It is a spirit of dialogue. It is

a spirit that both Serbia and Kosovo claim to support in their discussions in Brussels.

And yet, here in the Council today, we have witnessed yet another meeting that has descended into lengthy exchanges and unproductive statements. It is long past time for the Council to stop contributing to the tensions in the region by holding such incendiary briefings on so regular a basis. I therefore call again for a reduction in the number of these meetings and in the number of these reports. In that spirit, let me join the United States and others in again calling for increased efficiencies to be found in the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and for the further downscaling of the Mission, in line with its mandate. We also suppport calls for the Secretariat to present proposals for restructuring the Mission in the next report — something that we note has not materialized on this occasion.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Representative Zahir Tanin for his detailed briefing and his efforts and commitment to bringing peace to Kosovo.

The situation in Kosovo needs the continuing attention of the Council as an ongoing item on its agenda. Our priorities should be to continue promoting dialogue between the parties by launching confidence-building measures in the political, military, economic, environmental and human dimensions. That should be in compliance with resolution 1244 (1999) and with the efforts of the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other relevant organizations, which must act as security providers at the global, regional and national levels.

Moreover, while the peaceful dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade is ongoing, a number of difficult issues remain to be solved. Action must therefore be taken to integrate the judiciary, build transitional justice, transfer the functions and assets to local authorities and lay the foundations of good governance and the rule of law. Social stability will be achieved only with the full engagement of the United Nations country team, regional organizations and civil society groups working towards peacebuilding and conflict prevention and mediation in Kosovo.

Upholding human rights is critical, with a special focus on implementing resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and subsequent resolutions on enhancing gender equality and empowerment.

We also believe that the rich cultural heritage of Kosovo should be preserved as a bridge-builder for community relations and good-neighbourly relations.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): Please allow me to thank His Excellency President Nikolić of Serbia and Her Excellency Ambassador Çitaku of Kosovo for their briefings. I also thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Tanin for his briefing and continued service.

As indicated in the report (S/2017/95/Rev.1) of the Secretary-General, the escalation of tension between Pristina and Belgrade is a matter of concern. Violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism continue to pose a threat to security in Kosovo and the region. However, the risk and intensity of violence are considerably less than those in other regions often taken up by the Security Council, such as Africa or the Middle East. Limited peacekeeping resources should be allocated to areas where there is an urgent need for them. If the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) is indeed still necessary in its current configuration, as suggested by the report of the Secretary-General, the Council must identify the activities that specifically require such an UNMIK presence.

The efficient and effective functioning of the Council should also take priority. Indeed, improving working methods is of keen interest to all Council members. In that regard, we do not see any reason that meetings on UNMIK need to be held as frequently as during the time of the adoption of resolution 1244 (1999). A meeting and report every six months is sufficient. In spite of it all, personally, I myself appreciate the opportunity every three months to recall my memories of Kosovo. I mentioned wine the last time (see S/PV.7811); today I would like to talk about business opportunities.

The Trepča mines hold the largest natural resources in Kosovo and could potentially generate large sums of tax revenue. However, it is regrettable that challenges remain in the business of operating the mines. At the same time, there are other types of businesses in Kosovo. Allow me to share one example here. In 2013, a Japanese company established a farm and factory in Mitrovica, which produces shiitake mushrooms. By making use of Japanese high technology, the company has a production capacity of eight tons of mushrooms a day. It exports its produce to 12 countries in Europe

and North America. I have not brought any mushrooms with me today, and will not mention the name of the company. But I can share its contact details and home page later if anyone is interested.

Kosovo also has rich tourism resources. There is a magnificent waterfall in Mirusha, and Gadime e Poshtme is proud to be home to a mysterious limestone cavern. People can enjoy trout raised in fish farms in Istog at a restaurant adjacent to the farm. I even found a good natural hot spring — known as onsen in Japanese — near Peja, and I myself had a bath there. The sulphurous white water is pleasant and warm, just the right type of onsen for Japanese people like me. Mosques in Prizren and Orthodox monasteries in Dečani and Gračanica are breathtaking. Such sites appear in all Kosovo travel guides — such as the one I have here, which members can find in book shops — and represent great potential for tourism development in Kosovo. Let us take a trip to Kosovo and explore the country.

I would like to emphasize the following to the people of Kosovo. For Kosovo to be seen as a genuinely mature democracy, the greatest challenge is reconciliation between communities. Prior to the conflict in Kosovo, Kosovar Albanians and Kosovar Serbs lived in the same space. I have a female friend in Kosovo who is Kosovar-Albanian. She was very sad when the conflict broke out. Kosovar Albanians and Kosovar Serbs once lived together, but Kosovar Serbs were forced to flee in the wake of the conflict. The majority of them have not returned. Reconciliation must now be accelerated before the memories of a more harmonious time fade and are lost for good. As long as animosity and injustice remain in Kosovo society, tourists and foreign companies will hesitate to visit or invest. In that regard, Japan highly values the high level of commitment by both sides to resolve issues even after several incidents that heightened tensions. I ask both sides to demonstrate the rich, diverse cultures and societies of Kosovo through efforts to achieve reconciliation and tolerance, including the establishment of the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to recall three outstanding colleagues from my time as Chief Political Officer in UNMIK 17 years ago: Ms. Nadia Younes, Mr. Jean-Selim Kanaan and Ms. Fiona Watson. Ms Younes was UNMIK spokesperson, and her office was right next to mine. Mr. Kanaan and Ms. Watson were advisers to then Special Representative of the Secretary-General Kouchner. Mr. Kanaan was also my partner on winterization projects in Kosovo. They all worked very hard and contributed greatly to Kosovo's recovery from devastation and chaos. Three years later, a United Nations office was established in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. Then-Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sérgio Vieira de Mello, keenly aware of the high calibre of the three officers, brought them to Iraq. On 19 August 2003, Mr. De Mello convened a regular senior staff meeting with those three people present. A truck parked beside the building. A strong explosion occurred, turning the building into rubble. The attack killed whoever happened to be at the site, including those persons just mentioned best, the brightest of United Nations personnel. People with talent and bravery like them are tirelessly working at the forefront of peacekeeping missions to bring about peace and justice, at times in dangerous environments. We must never forget the dedication and sacrifice that many brilliant people have made in order to achieve peace.

In the hope that somehow they can hear me, I would like to report to those three great colleagues of mine that, in Kosovo, peace and stability, democracy and economic development have made steady progress.

Mr. Arancibia Fernández (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of Serbia, for his statement. I also thank Mr. Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), for his briefing on the current situation in Kosovo.

Bolivia calls for the implementation of resolution 1244 (1999), including full respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia. We think that the resolution is the international legal basis for resolving the situation in Kosovo.

In relation to the security situation in Kosovo, we would like to express our concern about the region, in particular the political instability that endangers the lives of minorities. With that in mind, we believe that the parties must be open to ongoing dialogue to reach solutions that promote progress and stability. We therefore welcome attempts by the parties to make progress in the dialogue under the auspices of the European Union in order to arrive at a lasting solution that will put an end to the disputes that affect the region. However, we are concerned that in practice the

parties do not seem able to implement the agreements that are the outcomes of those meetings. We urge the parties to maintain the dialogue through political determination, without it being hindered by the lack of a real commitment to a peaceful settlement.

Bolivia welcomes the agreement on telecommunications that confirms the assignment of a local area code for Kosovo.

We also call on the parties to join forces to help internally displaced persons return to their homes.

We also wish to call attention to the growing number of extremists in the region who support the Islamic State, which is a clear threat. We commend the efforts made to apprehend people associated with those activities. However, since this is an underlying and ongoing problem, we call for regional organizations and all the parties involved to focus on containing this evil, which is afflicting all humankind and is showing itself to be a clear threat to peace and stability of the region. Bolivia condemns terrorism in all its forms, and we believe that it is a duty for all States to combat it and seek its eradication.

The parties are called on to prevent the commission of acts of aggression that undermine the Charter of the United Nations and its embedded principles, in order to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Every effort should be made to achieve lasting peace, which in the long run will be beneficial to the region, with the parties primarily resolving their differences through dialogue and negotiation and with the assistance of regional organizations.

Finally, Bolivia takes note of the work of UNMIK.

Mr. Kandeel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Zahir Tanin, for his comprehensive briefing to the Security Council on the report (S/2017/95/Rev.1) of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). I also welcome Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of Serbia, and Ms. Vlora Çitaku, and thank them both for their briefings.

Egypt welcomes the progress achieved Kosovo in the economic and security spheres, as well as with regard to the rule of law, which will necessarily have a positive impact on peace and security in the region. However, we would also express our concern in connection with what is stated in the report about the increased tensions between Pristina and Belgrade and the diminished commitment to dialogue between the two.

We call on both sides to exercise self-restraint and avoid incitement and unilateral solutions that may lead to escalation. We reiterate that there is no alternative to dialogue as a means of resolving disputes, and therefore urge the leadership in Belgrade and Pristina to revive and reinvigorate the high-level dialogue between them under the auspices of the European Union without delay. That is how we can achieve consensual, fair and sustainable solutions that are acceptable to both sides and that lay the foundations for peace and stability in the region.

Accordingly, Egypt welcomes the efforts aimed at implementing the agreements reached between the two sides in August 2015 under the auspices of the European Union. In that context, we refer to the Secretary-General's report on the progress achieved in some areas, particularly in terms of the integration of the judiciary, freedom of movement, and telecommunications. But we would also like to express our disappointment at the lack of progress in a number of other areas related to those agreements, particularly in relation to the establishment of an association/community of Serbian-majority municipalities in Kosovo, which was one of the critical provisions of the agreements. We would therefore like to reiterate the importance of establishing such a community in order to guarantee institutional protection for the Serbian community in Kosovo.

Egypt's foreign policy is a pillar upholding security and stability in different regions. In that context, we underscore the importance of the Kosovo Parliament adopting the agreement on the border with Montenegro.

In conclusion, we reiterate Egypt's support for the efforts by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, particularly in relation to supporting the authorities in Kosovo in counter-terrorism and allowing them to better address the existing and emerging challenges that threaten security and stability in the region.

Mrs. Gueguen Mohsen (France) (*spoke in French*): I would add my thanks to those expressed by other members of the Security Council to the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Mr. Zahir Tanin, as well as to the President of Serbia,

Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, and to the Ambassador of Kosovo, Ms. Vlora Çitaku.

I should like to begin my statement by recalling once again France's wish to revise the frequency with which the Security Council reviews the situation in Kosovo. Given that the Council is facing an increasingly burdensome workload, there no longer appears to be any justification for maintaining quarterly briefings on the question of Kosovo, whose situation is in no way comparable to crises for which the Council's intensive commitment is crucial.

We believe also that the positive developments we have seen in recent years in Kosovo in terms of strengthening institutions justify our desire to continue to refocus the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and to ensure their coordination with the other international actors present in Kosovo. We call once again on the Secretary-General to make recommendations on this issue in the framework of his next report.

France is convinced that the future of Kosovo can no longer be seen as a priority in the Council, but, rather, within the framework of a political dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, led by the European Union.

It is therefore important in this regard for the parties to demonstrate a proactive commitment at the highest level. We expect that all of the agreements reached will be implemented as swiftly as possible, including as concerns the establishment of a community association of Serb-majority municipalities, which is a key element of the dialogue. We therefore urge the Kosovo and Serbian authorities to step up their efforts, particularly on this latter issue, in order to achieve more concrete outcomes in the months to come. This is an issue that we will follow very closely.

We are deeply concerned about the tensions that we have seen in recent months on the ground as well as by the regrettable provocations that have fuelled them. We expect all actors to show responsibility and restraint. The agreement reached on the demolition of the wall in Mitrovica is in this respect a positive development. The normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina remains, generally speaking, a prerequisite for their progress on the path to European rapprochement, which was once again encouraged at the Paris-Balkans 2016 summit, held on 4 July last.

The efforts under way to strengthen the rule of law in Kosovo must remain a priority and include fighting radicalization in all its forms. We therefore welcome the unconditional commitment of Kosovo in this regard, both locally and within the international coalition against Da'esh.

France will also continue to provide its support to the efforts undertaken by the authorities of Kosovo in favour of international recognition of their State.

Lastly, I would like to conclude my statement by pointing out that the action under way in France against Mr. Ramush Haradinaj is a part of a judicial proceeding initiated on the basis of an arrest warrant issued by INTERPOL. This order was carried out as a matter of routine, in keeping with our international commitments. It does not have a political dimension and does not alter in any way the relation of trust that we traditionally have with Kosovo or our support for reconciliation in the region and the implementation of a dialogue between Belgium and Pristina.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We express our appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Ambassador Zahir Tanin, for his briefing on the latest situation in Kosovo and the activities of the Mission. I also welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, at today's meeting and would like to thank him for his statement. I also thank Ambassador Çitaku for her statement.

Since this is the first time that we are speaking on this issue, we would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia, for the peaceful and amicable resolution of all outstanding issues and for the scrupulous observance and implementation of the Brussels Agreement. We believe that resolution 1244 (1999) remains an important framework for resolving the Kosovo issue through dialogue and negotiation.

We welcome the progress made in the implementation of the agreement reached within the framework of the European Union-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, specifically in the areas of integration of the judiciary, freedom of movement and telecommunication.

However, we also take note of what the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/95/Rev.1) states with

regard to the lack of progress on the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo and the delays in the implementation of the agreement on freedom of vehicular movement.

It is important that the parties remain fully committed to implementing the agreement that they have reached through the European Union dialogue process for the sake of promoting lasting peace and stability in Kosovo and the region as well as the building of trust and the normalization of their relations.

The report about the tense political situation between Belgrade and Pristina, on the one hand, and the strained relations between the governing and opposition parties and between parties within the governing coalition in Kosovo is a matter of concern. All parties need to refrain from escalating tension and seek peaceful avenues and dialogue to address any disputes.

We take note of what the Secretary-General stated in paragraph 37 of his report with regard to some leaders who show

> "sincere commitment, courage and the vision of a better future, free of the zero-sum approach that undermines the real interests of the people that they serve".

We believe that this is the kind of spirit that should guide all the parties in addressing difficult and sensitive issues in order to reach a fair compromise.

The growing threats of terrorism and violent extremism have been a recurring theme over the course of this month, including during the debate on conflicts in Europe and the briefing on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Kosovo and the region are not an exception to this, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General. The recruitment of fighters for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the arrest of several individuals suspected of planning terrorist attacks, as well as the weapons and explosives seized by the Kosovo authorities, are a clear indication of the seriousness of the threat, which needs to be given particular attention.

Finally, we appreciate the efforts of UNMIK in engaging all the parties and communities to promote security, stability and respect for human rights in Kosovo and the region. We believe that the role of the Mission remains important in addressing current and emerging challenges on the ground. In this regard, we welcome the continued engagement of UNMIK with Belgrade and Pristina as well as the communities in Kosovo and regional and international actors in carrying out its mandate.

Mr. Skau (Sweden). I would like to start by joining others in thanking Special Representative Tanin for his comprehensive briefing to the Council today. I would also like to thank President Nikolić and Ambassador Çitaku for their statements to the Council.

Much progress has been made since the end of the conflict in Kosovo, in June 1999; however, building peaceful and prosperous societies requires constant vigilance and an unwavering commitment by political leaders from both parties as well as from the international community that stands with them. We are therefore concerned over the recent rise in tensions between Kosovo and Serbia, and we call on both sides to redouble their efforts for peace by showing restraint and refraining from inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions.

The experience of the European Union has shown us that lasting stability can be built through dynamic European Union (EU) integration processes. The peoples of Serbia and Kosovo are looking towards a future, together, within the European Union, rather than to the divisions of the past. The focus of all efforts should be on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo within the context of the EU accession process. Therefore, we encourage Pristina and Belgrade to engage constructively in the EU-facilitated dialogue. By realizing their European perspective, Kosovo and Serbia can cement a stable, democratic and prosperous future for their populations. It is essential that the status issue does not hinder Kosovo on its European path or prevent its membership in international organizations. The goal of the Security Council should also be to support the normalization of relations and a smooth transfer of responsibility to the peoples living in Kosovo. In that regard, we are ready to engage in discussions concerning the future of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo.

We call on all Kosovar politicians from both the Government and the opposition to overcome their disagreements through dialogue and refrain from disruptive behaviour in order to implement the crucial

reforms needed to benefit the people in Kosovo and the wider region.

Sweden is ready to play its part. We look forward to continuing our bilateral development cooperation as well as our political support to Kosovo's progress in the areas of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable and inclusive economic development.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank and commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, our friend Ambassador Zahir Tanin, for his excellent presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/95/Rev.1) and reassure him once again of the full support of the Senegalese delegation in his mission. I also welcome the presence of His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and of Ambassador Vlora Çitaku of Kosovo, and thank them for their statements, which have certainly elucidated our understanding of the situation under review.

Just last week in this very Chamber, we discussed the conflicts that are currently taking place in Europe (see S/PV.7886), which was an occasion for Secretary-General António Guterres to remind us that what are known as frozen conflicts will continue to threaten international peace and security only until they are peacefully and definitively settled. In the opinion of the Senegalese delegation, the Kosovo conflict is emblematic of such conflicts. My delegation is therefore concerned by the recent and persistent tensions cited in the Secretary-General's report, which are somewhat undermining the significant progress that has been made since the end of the conflict by the stakeholders from both sides.

Accordingly, with a view to relaunching a dynamic that will promote building and durably sustaining stability, not only for Kosovo but for the entire Balkan region, the Senegalese delegation strongly encourages, on the one hand, the Kosovar political stakeholders to work to maintaining a peaceful political environment, which largely depends on the quality of the political dialogue with Belgrade; and, on the other hand, the Serbian authorities to maintain and strengthen their commitment in a constructive and calm dialogue with Pristina. In that regard, Senegal welcomes the progress that the two parties have made, in particular within the framework of the dialogue conducted under the auspices of the European Union, and encourages those partners with influence on both sides to continue to use it to promote and guide talks.

In order to consolidate the results that have been achieved in that framework, we believe that the agreements reached to date must be implemented and that the political leaders of both parties must fully commit in a consultative manner to resuming talks. Everyone here has said that that is only path towards resolving the crisis.

The recent developments described in the report of the Secretary-General — in particular the slowness in establishing the association/community of Serb-majority municipalities, the arrest of the former Prime Minister and the current leader of the main opposition party in Kosovo, Mr. Ramush Haradinaj, on 4 Jaunuary in Paris, and the diplomatic incident provoked by trains originating in Serbia — recall the absolute necessity for the Council to continue to support talks at the highest levels within a dynamic of cooperation at the United Nations and subregional organizations.

My delegation believes that those difficulties can be overcome and that they must in no way slow the progress that has been made — it must be noted — such as the assignment of an international dialling code for Kosovo as well as the implementation of the agreement allowing that country to host a special tribunal to investigate crimes committed during the conflict in Kosovo. In that same vein, we welcome the high-level meeting that took place in Brussels on 24 January and was organized by Ms. Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in which the Presidents of Serbia and Kosovo participated. During that meeting, commitments were made to resume talks under the auspices of the European Union.

The Senegalese delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that we must pursue our efforts in the context of the humanitarian situation and human rights, as Ms. Karima Bennoune, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, stated following her visit to Serbia and Kosovo in October 2016. We believe that the activities carried out within the framework of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, the mandate of which has been extended to 14 June, are helpful because they contribute to enhancing achievements related to defending and promoting the

rule of law and human rights, as well as the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

Furthermore, the Senegalese delegation welcomes the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo in promoting reconciliation, transitional justice, human rights and support for the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. In addition to encouraging dialogue, Senegal urges stakeholders to redouble and strengthen confidence-building measures by laying the groundwork for the easing of tensions and development, notably by promoting the implementation of the agreements of 25 August 2015 in northern Kosovo.

The Senegalese delegation therefore reiterates its full support for the joint European Union-United Nations programme aimed at strengthening trust between communities, in particular through the protection of cultural heritage, and calls for the strengthening of cooperation on information sharing with a view to resolving the painful question of missing persons.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to thank Mr. Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing. China welcomes the presence of His Excellency Mr. Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and the statement that he made. We also listened attentively to the statement made by Ms. Çitaku.

China respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia and understands its legitimate concerns on the question of Kosovo. China acknowledges the positive efforts of Serbia in the search for a political solution to the question of Kosovo. Resolution 1244 (1999) constitutes the legal foundation for the solution to the question of Kosovo. China supports the efforts of the concerned parties to search for an appropriate solution, acceptable to all, through dialogue and negotiations, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and within the framework of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Currently, the overall situation in Kosovo remains calm. Underlying complex questions, however, remain and defy efforts to finding a solution. China hopes that all parties will continue to search for a political solution, engage in high-level political dialogue, settle their differences through practical and constructive dialogue, implement the agreements reached so far, build upon progress, increase mutual trust and seek rapprochement so that a lasting and appropriate solution can be found gradually to the question of Kosovo.

The achievement of national reconciliation is essential to resolving the Kosovo question. The parties concerned should endeavour to improve the well-being of the people, strengthen protection for the rights and benefits of all communities in Kosovo, refrain from any rhetoric or action that might escalate tensions, and safeguard peace, stability and development in the Balkan region.

The Security Council should continue to follow the question of Kosovo and persist in efforts to find an appropriate solution. China appreciates the work done by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) under the leadership of Special Representative Tanin. China supports the constructive cooperation of UNMIK with all the parties in accordance with its mandate. China hopes that UNMIK, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, and the Kosovo Force will further their coordination and gradually improve the situation in Kosovo, thus playing a constructive role in finally resolving the question.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ukraine.

I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Kosovo and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Mr. Zahir Tanin, for his comprehensive briefing on the developments in Kosovo. I would like to reiterate Ukraine's full support to him as he carries out his important functions. I am also grateful to His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia, and to Ms. Vlora Çitaku.

We note that throughout the reporting period there have been a series of regrettable events that caused a significant increase in tension. Those tensions are a matter of concern, as they could impede the process of normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, and negatively affect the lives of all of Kosovo's residents.

Ukraine welcomes the role of the European Union (EU) in diffusing tensions and commends the resumption of high-level meetings between Belgrade and Pristina in Brussels. We call upon the political leaders in Belgrade and Pristina to actively work to avoid provocation, confrontation and an escalation into

conflict. It is important that, in the spirit of restraint and responsibility, they put aside their political abitions and focus on further progress in the implementation of the agreed commitments, which would benefit the people in the region and enhance their European prospects.

We are encouraged by the tangible results in the implementation of the agreements concluded in the framework of the EU-led dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, in particular on freedom of movement, telecommunication and justice. Ukraine looks forward to further progress in the fulfilment of outstanding commitments, including on the establishment of association/community of Serb-majority municipalities.

Ukraine continues to support the important role played by UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force, in which Ukrainian peacekeepers contribute to preserving peace and stability in Kosovo.

At the same time, like other delegations, we believe that it is time to reconsider the frequency of UNMIK periodic reports. It might be appropriate to adopt a more flexible approach. Resolution 1244 (1999) requests the Secretary-General to report at regular intervals, without specifying how often. We believe the Council could agree to have regular reports twice a year, with the option of spot reports as may be required by the situation on the ground.

Finally, it is also time to review the role of the United Nations in Kosovo, including vis-à-vis its regional presence and possible steps towards its rationalization. We believe that converting UNMIK into a special political mission should be considered as an option, as that would appropriately reflect its current role.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7892

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7892nd meeting

Tuesday, 28 February 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Yelchenko	(Ukraine)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Vaverka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Klein
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2010/507)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2010/507)

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I would like to draw Council members' attention to a letter from the President of the Security Council dated 9 February 2017, inviting States Members and Permanent Observers of the United Nations to communicate to the presidency, if they so wish, suggestions regarding issues concerning the work of the Security Council during the month of February to be proposed for consideration at our meeting today.

I would like to thank the Member States that have submitted contributions to us. We were happy to see that they came from various regions of the world. The questions and proposals suggested concerned both substantive agenda items and the Council's working methods, and in our opinion deserve our serious consideration. An informal list of all the communications received was brought to Council members' attention. We hope that delegations will address the issues that were raised in their statements today. In the view of the presidency, establishing such a practice could contribute to enhancing the interaction between the Council and the general membership of the United Nations.

I now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have been speaking in Arabic during our meetings because it is the official language of my country, but today I will speak in English, because I am speaking on behalf of all of my colleagues, and Ethiopia and Senegal in particular.

(*spoke in English*)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African countries that are members of the Security Council, that is, Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal.

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's meeting to consider the implementation of presidential note S/2010/507. We believe it represents an important opportunity for Council members to go on the record with reflections on the work of the Council during the past month. On behalf of the African members, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your stewardship of the Council, and for a job well done during a very busy month, with many achievements.

The African members of the Council would like to highlight the following conclusions based on the work of the Council since the beginning of the year.

During the past month, the Security Council has continued to deal with an evolving set of complex conflicts and unresolved disputes on its agenda. Those evolving and emerging challenges will require a more robust, coherent and comprehensive approach on the part of the Security Council if they are to be resolved. Speaking from an African perspective, we feel that it would be very timely for the Council to adopt the concept of sustaining peace, in a practical and applied manner, as a target and process. We continue to believe that the Council is still far from achieving that target. There is a need for a paradigm shift in mentality, from one focused on managing conflicts to one that addresses their root causes, in accordance with their various contexts, ensuring national reconciliation and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development. The set of tools available to the Council should be used judiciously, pursuant to varying contexts and realities on the ground. That will require enhanced analysis capacities and orchestrated engagement with various United Nations bodies by furthering the bridging and advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Against that backdrop, and while regional and international efforts in South Sudan have fallen short of assisting South Sudan to restore peace and achieve national reconciliation, now there are nonetheless good prospects following the joint meeting at the initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the African Union (AU) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, on 29 January in Addis Ababa, to revitalize the peace process with a view to ending the vicious cycle of violence and achieve national reconciliation. It is critical that the people of South Sudan, while respecting their diversity, also honour and foster their unity.

Together with addressing the root causes by contributing to the building by the South Sudanese of their national institutions of governance, the

Council should seriously enhance its consultation and coordination with regional actors, in line with the joint statement of 29 January, in order to ensure that all South Sudanese recommit to peace and end the violence. In that vein, empowering President Konaré's efforts is important and cannot be overemphasized. We see the national dialogue as a crucial opportunity to redirect the parties' attitude towards ending violence. The national dialogue should go beyond power-sharing arrangements and be conducted in an inclusive, transparent and credible manner so as to represent a real opportunity for peace and inclusivity.

The three African members of the Security Council reiterate their commitment to the prevention of conflicts, and in that regard stress the effective engagement of the Council in Gambia's political crisis between December 2016 and January 2017, which led to the peaceful handover of power to the current President, Mr. Adama Barrow. The African members commend the Council's approach, which culminated in the unanimous adoption of resolution 2337 (2017). The resolution was a manifestation of the prevention of conflict in action. It was also a result of a strong partnership between the United Nations, the AU and the subregional organization — namely, the Economic Community of West African States — as well as a testimony to the complementary roles played by the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council in maintaining regional and international peace and security. After that milestone achievement, the African members would like to highlight the need to continue to extend support to the new Gambian authorities in order to sustain peace and consolidate efforts towards Gambia's development.

The Council followed closely developments that took place in Somalia. It adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2017/3 on February 10, welcoming the conclusion of the electoral process, which culminated with the election of PresidentMohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo". Furthermore, the statement underscored major upcoming benchmarks, in particular building a strong Somali national army, functioning State institutions capable of delivering basic services, establishing law and order, and the launching of the constitutional review process. The three African members reiterate the need for the Security Council to continue closely monitoring the situation in Somalia and for the international community to enhance its support for Somali and African efforts with regard to stabilizing Somalian institution-building and economic revival.

Furthermore, in a press statement on 20 February (SC/12722), the President of the Council condemned the heinous terrorist attack that shook a Mogadishu market on 19 February, leaving around 40 dead and many more injured. This incident is a stark reminder of the continuous and precarious threat posed by Al-Shabaab to the fragile accomplishments achieved in Somalia. In this regard, the African members firmly believe that this challenge can be tackled only by rallying support for the African Union Mission in Somalia and the Somali national forces to rid Somalia and the region of the scourge of terrorism. The African members also note the importance of adopting a comprehensive and holistic approach to combating terrorism that is not limited solely to military and security means but extends to other relevant dimensions, including the economic, social, cultural and religious.

The three African members welcome the recent decision of the Security Council to visit the countries of the Lake Chad basin — namely, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria — from 2 to 7 March, with the objective to strengthen its support to the victims and affected countries in their efforts to address the threats posed by the terrorist groups Boko Haram and Da'esh, as well as to mitigate the humanitarian situation related thereto.

Once again, on behalf of the African members of the Security Council, we thank you, Sir, and we look forward to the United Kingdom presidency and to cooperating and supporting it in ensuring a successful outcome.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): Under your impetus, Sir, the Security Council's work in February was marked by very rich activity on all the subjects on its agenda, from Africa to the Middle East and Europe. More sadly, this month was also tragically marked by the sudden loss of the Permanent Representative of Russia, Vitaly Churkin, to whom we again pay tribute.

I would like to refer first to the meetings we have held on crises in Africa.

The consultations of 3 February with the Secretary-General upon his return from the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa were a highlight of this month. They provided an opportunity for an informal and in-depth exchange with the Secretary-General, who

expressed his willingness to make the strengthening of the relationship with the African Union a priority. We share his desire to continue to work better with the African Union and are committed to continuing this effort, both with the proposals to be submitted on the basis of resolution 2320 (2016), as well as with a view to future joint consultations between the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council.

Several country situations in Africa also caught the attention of the Council this month. In particular, at the 8 February meeting on Côte d'Ivoire (see S/PV.7880), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire confirmed that the country continues to consolidate peace and stability and to make progress in areas related to national reconciliation and social cohesion. In that context, the transfer of the responsibilities of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire to the Ivorian authorities continues, in accordance with the mission's withdrawal plan. That meeting also recalled the enduring challenges. As illustrated by the incidents in January and February within the armed forces, more efforts are needed to reform of the security sector. President Ouattara's commitment is particularly encouraging. In this and other areas, the United Nations country team will continue to support the authorities' efforts towards stability and development. We hope that the international community will provide financial support for the transition plan presented last fall.

As regards the Central African Republic, we must remain vigilant. President Touadera and his Government, with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and other partners, are pursuing their efforts on behalf of stability and reconcilation, but they face armed groups that refuse to participate in good faith in dialogue and reform, and that pursue criminal activities. That is unacceptable at a time when the Central African Republic has the historic opportunity to move towards long-term stability. In that context, we welcome MINUSCA's affirmation of its posture and strengthening of its credibility. Armed groups must understand that pursuing criminal activities at the expense of State-building and suffering imposed on civilians will lead them nowhere .

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Council met last week at our initiative to discuss the situation in Kasai and the lack of progress in the implementation of the 31 December political agreement. Testifying to our shared concern, the members of the Security Council adopted a press statement (SC/12734) calling on the Congolese Government to immediately conduct a credible and impartial investigation and to bring to justice those responsible for the violence. The statement also calls on the Congolese parties to implement without delay the agreement of 31 December, in particular by appointing a Prime Minister. Two months after the signing of the agreement, it is more necessary than ever to maintain the good political will that made the agreement possible if more insecurity is to be avoided in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The statement also reflects the Council's willingness to closely monitor developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and — most importantly — to take action against Congolese actors whose statements or conduct would undermine the proper application of the agreement and the organization of elections.

At the initiative of the presidency, the activities of the Council have also been marked by several European dossiers, starting with the ministerial debate on European conflicts (see S/PV.7886), as well as the annual briefing by the chairmanship-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presented by the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs (see S/PV.7887) and, yesterday, the briefing on the situation in Kosovo (see/SPV.7891). As members know, France is deeply committed to a resolution of the crisis in Ukraine, which must include re-establishing Ukraine's control over the entirety of its internationally recognized borders, including in Crimea. Along with our German partners, France remains determined to pursue its efforts under the Normandy format. Every result achieved on the ground matters. In our view, there is today no alternative solution but to support the implementation of the Minsk agreements, which is the only way to make progress towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

We are also convinced of the central role on the ground of the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as of the need to allow it carry out its mandate without hindrance. The resumption of fighting in recent days and the incidents targeting observers should lead us to step up our engagement on this issue, which the Security Council must continue to follow closely.

I should now like to turn to some issues relating to the Middle East that continue to be of concern to us. Turning first to Libya, the Council's consultations

on 8 February made it possible to express a solid convergence of views among members of the Council with regard to supporting the efforts of Prime Minister Faiez Mustafa Serraj to make the institutions established under the Skhirat Agreement more effective and representative, with heightened positive support from neighbouring countries and with the full support of United Nations mediation, which remains central. We hope that this positive momentum will be pursued in support of a political solution that is fully inclusive. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General and the Council are fully engaged to that end. France will not let up in its efforts in that regard.

With regard to the peace process in the Middle East, the two-State solution has never been so threatened. The recent announcements by the Government of Israel concerning the settlement policy — announcing the construction of more than 6,000 new housing units — and the adoption by the Knesset of a law retroactively legalizing previous settlements on Palestinian land give rise to great concern. France hopes that the next report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) will make it possible to take stock of the consequences of those announcements to the contiguity of and accessibility to Palestinian territories.

Lastly, on Syria, after a few weeks' calm following the signing of the Russian-Turkish agreement on the ceasefire, the situation on the ground is once again deteriorating. The regime and the militias that support it are once again bombing civilian facilities, including hospitals, in numerous Syrian locales. Terrorist attacks are also continuing, in particular in Homs three days ago. More than 1,000 people have died since 22 December. We therefore hope that the monitoring mechanism developed in Astana will make it possible to establish full respect for the ceasefire throughout the whole of the territory, including full, unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, especially to the 13 areas still under siege by the regime.

It is against that worrying backdrop that the intra-Syrian negotiations have resumed in Geneva, under the auspices of the United Nations and including representatives of the regime and the opposition. We hope that the Syrian regime will at last accept to engage in good-faith discussions on the parameters for the necessary political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Another area of major concern with regard to Syria has to do with the fact that it continues to be a theatre for the repeated use of chemical weapons against civilians. To put an end to that, France and the United Kingdom, along with the United States, have strenuously endeavoured in recent months to bring the Council together around a response to those crimes, and have prepared a draft resolution on which the Council will soon act. We hope that the members of the Security Council, as they did in the case of resolution 2118 (2113), will assume their responsibilities and sanction the perpetrators of those criminal acts in violation of the universal prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

Allow me to conclude by once again commending you, Mr. President, for the professionalism with which you have led the work of the Council during the month of February. I should also like to highlight the ongoing efforts of the successive presidencies to improve the working methods of the Council, both in terms of effectiveness and transparency. In that regard, we welcome the numerous elements to the press that have been agreed, which have made it possible for everyone to better understand the Council's deliberations in private consultations. We know we can count on the upcoming British presidency in pursuing that initiative and making the Council as effective a tool as possible in the service of peace and stability.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your excellent presidency during the month of February, especially today as Japan welcomes the efforts of the President to make formal wrap-up meetings more meaningful. I thank the delegations who made suggestions, and would like to touch upon some of the points raised.

First, on North Korea, it was significant that the Security Council, with new members in 2017, unanimously condemned the 12 February ballistic missile launch in a timely manner. In 2016 alone, North Korea conducted two nuclear tests and launched over 20 ballistic missiles, presenting an elevated level of threat. Such acts constitute blatant violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions, and are serious and direct threats to the international community as a whole. Japan calls upon all Member States, including the members of the Security Council, to strictly implement the relevant resolutions so that North Korea will change its course of action, commit to de-nuclearization, and return to dialogue.

On Syria, Japan believes that the Intra-Syrian talks must contribute to improving the humanitarian situation on the ground. At the Council meeting last week (see S/PV.7888), bureaucratic impediments and the security situation were raised as obstacles to humanitarian access. Japan has been urging the Syrian Government to simplify procedures, and we have received a written confirmation from the Government in that regard. However, that must be implemented on the ground. With regard to the draft resolution on Syrian chemical weapons, the Council needs to show its determination that the parties responsible will be held accountable.

Turning to South Sudan, the continuing violence and worsening humanitarian situation, exacerbated by the famine, are serious concerns. The national dialogue should be truly inclusive and widely embraced both domestically and internationally. Japan urges the South Sudanese Government to take concrete actions, including on the deployment of the Regional Protection Force and unhindered access for the United Nations Mission in South Sudan and for humanitarian aid workers.

Japan has been making efforts to ameliorate the situation, including by dispatching our Prime Minister's Special Envoy, to urge the South Sudanese Government on the points I have mentioned and by providing financial assistance for humanitarian purposes through United Nations agencies as well as through the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

I would particularly like to express my gratitude to those delegations that showed interest in presidential note S/2010/507. Discussion is under way at the Informal Working Group on Documentation and other Procedural Questions with a view to updating the note based on the views and proposals expressed at the open debate (see S/PV.7740) on working methods last July under Japan's presidency and on other occasions. Thus far, the Working Group has discussed such matters as reporting cycles, wrap-up sessions and Security Council missions. On 24 February, we discussed how we can improve the way we conduct the informal consultations of the whole. The goal is to make progress on the actual working methods of the Council. I cannot stress enough the importance of implementation, particularly by the Permanent Representatives of the Council.

Concerning the annual report of the Security Council, Japan is working with all countries that served on the Council during the 17-month reporting period to prepare the report to the General Assembly.

Lastly, with regard to the lessons learned on the process of selecting a Secretary-General, I issued a note in my personal capacity with some concrete suggestions, including on announcing the results of the Council's consideration of the candidates in order to increase transparency. I hope that the note will be useful in five or 10 years.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): I join my colleagues in the Security Council in reaffirming our commitment to all issues addressed during the month of February. However, I would like to focus on three items that appeared on the agenda in February and to which Kazakhstan is making a contribution: Central Asia, Syria and counter-terrorism.

My first point relates to the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. Although the situation in Central Asia is relatively stable, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Petko Draganov has indicated various vulnerabilities that make it fragile. Kazakhstan is therefore focusing the attention of the Council on the importance of building social and economic stability to promote long-term sustainable development in Afghanistan. Investment is being made in the education, health care, transport and communications sectors. Other Central Asian countries are also joining hands in that endeavour for a peaceful and secure Afghanistan. As a country representing Central Asia, Kazakhstan will pay great attention to preventive measures to ensure peace and security in Afghanistan and the region.

Secondly, with regard to Syria, Kazakhstan supports the measures taken by the United Nations, the Russian Federation, Turkey, Iran, with some Arab countries, the United States, the European Union and other international stakeholders, together with the Syrian Government and its opposition. Seen as a neutral bridge-builder, my Government has been trusted by all sides of the conflict. My Government hosted the meeting on Syria on 15 and 16 February in Astana to pave the way for inter-Syrian negotiations in Geneva. We were able to contribute to discussions on the release of detainees and abductees, the exchange of prisoners and bodies, the identification of missing persons, the provision of unhindered and sustainable humanitarian access, with the free movement of civilians and, finally, the implementation of the ceasefire regime and the

setting-up of a joint operations group, with a view to consolidating efforts. The involvement of Jordan, which hosts hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, was a move in the right direction and the Astana process is therefore an important step forward.

Thirdly, with regard to counter-terrorism, as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities, we convened a meeting on 3 February at which the Committee members discussed the comprehensive report of the Ombudsperson on retaining a petitioner on the sanctions list. The Committee has also considered the nineteenth report of the Monitoring Team (S/2017/35) and noted that, notwithstanding the sustained military pressure from the international coalition and Government troops in Syria and Iraq, the presence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaida affiliates is a continuing threat to international security in wider regions of the world, especially in South-East Asia and West and East Africa. The report of the Ombudsperson's investigation on the petitioner, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the Monitoring Team, clearly indicate the fragmentation and inadequacy of international efforts to defeat global terrorism. Therefore, we fully support the Secretary-General's proposals on the United Nations counter-terrorism architecture aimed at guiding the States Members of the Organization to better respond to terrorist threats and challenges.

Mr. Klein (United States of America): As we look back on the Security Council's work in February, first, once again, I would like to offer the deepest condolences of the United States to the Russian Federation on the passing of Ambassador Churkin. We were shocked and saddened and our thoughts are especially with the team at the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations at this time.

I congratulate you, Sir, and the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations on a successful presidency, even as your country continues to deal with the Russian occupation of Crimea and the dire situation in Eastern Ukraine. That situation necessarily was a major focus of the emergency meeting on Ukraine (see S/PV.7876) that you called early in the month and also your important open debate on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886). We continue to support the Minsk agreements and their full implementation as the best path to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The United States condemns last month's targeting of monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the seizure of a Special Monitoring Mission unmanned aerial vehicle by combined Russian separatist forces. It is imperative that those forces stop their attacks on civilian infrastructure, including the Donetsk water filtration station. We call on Russia and the separatist forces it backs to immediately observe the ceasefire, withdraw all heavy weapons and allow full and unfettered access to the OSCE monitors.

It was right and appropriate for Ukraine to draw attention to the sometimes overlooked danger of terrorists attacks on critical infrastructure. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) to help all States to prevent, mitigate and respond to such attacks and provide an impetus for Governments to cooperate more on critical infrastructure protection.

Looking ahead, the United States urges the Council to strongly condemn the Syrian regime's blatant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of resolution 2118 (2013) and to support the draft accountability resolution co-authored by the United States, France and the United Kingdom, which will be considered right after this meeting. As we move into March, the Council must remain vigilant on the overall situation in Syria and support Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to advance a political solution to end the rising violence and help ease the enormous suffering of the Syrian people.

Finally, I would like to highlight the Council's upcoming mission to Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria — under the leadership of the United Kingdom, Senegal and France — to examine the security and humanitarian impact of the Boko Haram conflict. The United States welcomes the progress made by the forces in Nigeria, Chad, the Niger, Cameroon and Benin, working together as the Multinational Joint Task Force, to clear the territory of Boko Haram and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-West Africa fighters. We look forward to discussing with the peoples and Governments of the Lake Chad basin region how best to support the humanitarian response to meet the needs of the conflict-affected population, as well as how best to support military and civilian initiatives in order to counter violent extremism and restore peace and stability.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Sir, for an excellently run month of February and to commit our

full support to the United Kingdom as it takes up the gavel for the month of March.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): At the outset, allow me to commend you, Sir, on your initiative to make the formal wrap-up sessions more interactive by inviting the membership to ask the presidency questions that Security Council members may attempt to answer during the meeting. This is a positive step towards updating and improving our working methods.

Before briefly addressing some of those questions, allow me to focus on one issue that has emerged as a common theme in many of our meetings this month and in January — illicit trafficking, including in cultural property, arms, drugs and human beings. In the first two months of our term, my delegation has consistently raised that issue and proposed language on it as appropriate in consultations, and when negotiating products of the Council. We have brought it up, for example, in our debate on Western Africa and Central Asia, the terms of reference for the mission to the Lake Chad basin, Guinea-Bissau, counter-terrorism efforts and the priorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. We must be well aware of the challenges that illicit trafficking poses to the international community and of its dual nature as a potential cause and consequence of conflicts.

We are concerned about the growing links between transnational organized crime and terrorist organizations. Illicit trafficking has become a growing source of revenue for terrorists. It exacerbates conflict and fuels insecurity and instability. Trafficking in human beings offends our collective engagement and may amount to war crimes when committed in conflict situations, or crimes against humanity. This is why my delegation welcomes the Council's strong involvement with the issue, particularly in areas affected by conflict, as underlined most recently in the presidential statement contained in document S/PRST/2015/25 and resolution 2331 (2016).

My delegation has consistently raised this challenge when discussing a specific country or region so as to emphasize the complexity of the security scenario and the critical importance of consolidating our joint efforts to prevent and tackle all forms of illicit trafficking and its impact on international peace and security. Allow me to recall in particular the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and resolutions 2195 (2014) and 2331 (2016), which stress the direct linkages between trafficking and large movements of persons and aim to prevent the financing of terrorism through all forms of illicit trafficking. Looking ahead to the visit of the Security Council to the Lake Chad basin, we are eager to hear assessments on the effectiveness of measures to prevent trafficking in weapons to armed groups and any other forms of trafficking.

Naturally, international cooperation is crucial since it is simply beyond the capacity of any single State to take on pre-emptive action to address a problem that typically involves different countries of origin, transit and destination. This is why we believe Council involvement is so important. In this respect, Italy is also promoting the organization of high-level debate on the Palermo Convention and its implementation, which will be held at the United Nations in New York in June.

Turning briefly to some of the questions raised by the membership, in particular on working methods, and offering our perception as an incoming member — we have been here for two months — I must say that I have found the Security Council to be very effective and more united than I had been told it would be. Of course, political differences do remain, and Japan, incidentally, is working very hard with the assistance of all delegations to improve and update our working methods, which is a crucial element in our endeavours.

With regard to consultations, I have found Council members to be very constructive. Everyone is well aware of the need to manage time efficiently and has an interest in having an interactive discussion, going beyond talking points, thus enabling a better understanding of where delegations stand on the issues being debated. Preparing briefers in advance for a focused discussion and summing up the meeting with press elements are good examples of how we are trying to improve our working methods. I think both the Swedish presidency and that of Ukraine have been very effective in this regard.

In our view, a game-changer has been the Secretary-General's direct involvement in Council proceedings and the Secretariat's taking a more proactive role in providing policy options to Council members. The meetings with the Secretary-General on 3 and 24 February on his recent trips to Africa and the Middle East stand out, in our view, as best practices that the Council should pursue as often as possible in order to make its proceedings more goal-oriented and policy-driven.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on your stewardship of this still-unfinished, very busy month of February. At the same time, we of course wish all the best to the incoming United Kingdom presidency.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The past month has been a very full one for the Security Council. In particular, there have been several meetings on regional and general issues.

I would now like to talk about the three important thematic debates that took place on the situation in the Eurasian region: on the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886) and the Austrian Chairperson-in-Office's briefing on the priorities for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (see S/PV.7887).

The outcome of the briefing by the head of UNRCCA, Mr. Draganov, on 2 February, led the Russian delegation to distribute a draft Security Council press statement. Unfortunately, due to the stubborn refusal of some delegations to recognize the close cooperation of UNRCCA with regional organizations, including the OSCE, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the text was not agreed for the fourth time in a row. The lack of reaction on the activities of UNRCCA not only hurts the image of the Security Council but also has a negative impact on cooperation between the Centre and countries of the region. It also fails to convey the right message to the Secretary-General of the United Nations who has made preventive diplomacy the crux of his activities.

We had hoped that during the 21 February meeting (see S/PV.7886), the Security Council would constructively discuss ways to react collectively to European challenges. Indeed, refutation of the policy of indivisible security has caused protracted conflicts and triggered new ones in Europe. We also had hoped that we would jointly convince Kyiv of the need to implement the Minsk agreements. Many delegations spoke of that at that time and today. However, we have to note that these hopes were dashed.

We share the priorities set out by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office — the Foreign Minister of Austria, Mr. Kurz — on 22 February (see S/PV.7887). We would like to see constructive cooperation in such key areas as conflict resolution, combating radicalization and extremism, and restoring trust among States. We would like to see the further development of cooperation between the United Nations and the OSCE, including in the interest of this major European organization implementing United Nations decisions.

With respect to the unabated threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Jabhat Al-Nusra, Al-Qaida and their enablers, the Security Council should focus on the pressing issue of counter-terrorism. It is high time to establish a broad counter-terrorist coalition and improve measures to combat the fuelling and ideology of terrorism. The thematic meeting of the Security Council on 13 February on the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorists (see S/PV.7882) and the content of resolution 2341 (2017) unfortunately could hardly be considered evidence of priority being given to counter-terrorism. The discussions brought no new elements to the work of the Council or its existing decisions.

The discussion of the issue of the Middle East conflict on 16 February (see S/PV.7885) showed that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be marked by destabilizing factors, including repeated acts of violence, tensions around Gaza and settlement activities. We are convinced that there is a need today more than ever to take practical measures to unblock the peace process. Our proposal to conduct meetings with Messrs. Netanyahu and Abbas in Moscow remains on the table. We would like to see the Palestinian sides implement the agreements achieved during the meeting in Moscow from 15 to 17 January.

We nevertheless note a new positive feature — consultations on 3 February, where the new Secretary-General, upon his initiative, briefed the Security Council on his participation at the African Union (AU) summit. We note Mr. Guterres' intention to scale up cooperation with the AU and other African organizations with a view to settling conflicts on the continent. We support his intention to seek African solutions to African problems, with the whatever assistance is needed from the United Nations.

In conclusion, we would like to wish every success to the delegation of the United Kingdom, which will be heading the Council in the month of March.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, I too would like to begin by expressing our heartfelt congratulations to you and your team on your leadership of the work of the Security Council this

month, which theoretically — well, not theoretically, as February is in fact the shortest calendar month of the year — could mean less work, but the intensity of the work has in no way diminished, and your delegation has been in continuous motion and provided very able leadership.

The month of February has also brought us an absence, in the form of the death of our colleague Ambassador Vitaly Churkin. This event affected us all, and once again we wish to reiterate our condolences to his family and to the Government of the Russian Federation, as well as to our colleagues at the Russian Mission.

In February, the Council has adopted a number of resolutions, on terrorist attacks against critical infrastructure (resolution 2341 (2017)), the renewal of the mandates of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (resolution 2343 (2017)) and of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan (resolution 2340 (2017)), and on the 2140 (2014) Committee's sanctions on Yemen (resolution 2342 (2017)). We also adopted a presidential statement on Somalia in the wake of that country's elections (S/PRST/2017/3). We have adopted a number of press statements and, as has unfortunately been the trend at to date, some of them have been in response to terrorist attacks.

With regard to Security Council meetings, I do not want to talk about each meeting but would like to refer to several, particularly those that were not public and to which the general membership did not have access. I will of course respect the confidential nature of consultations.

I would like to begin by mentioning a consultation that took place on 3 Februay in which the Secretary-General participated in person and discussed his participations at the African Union summit. We thank the Secretary-General for sharing first-hand with Council members the details of his busy agenda in Addis Ababa. That was the first time that I participated in the Council, and it was a very open initiative in which the Secretary-General gave a very comprehensive overview not only on the meeting that he held in Addis Ababa but also on the political context of the situation in the region. It was extremely useful to have that exchange with him and exhange views.

The Council also discussed a number of issues under the agenda item of "Any other business". Uruguay called for one of those meetings on the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. As a troop-contributing country, Uruguay places a very high importance on respect by the parties of Security Council mandates, as well as with with regard to documents that have been signed with Secretariat. Unilateral measures not only affect peacekeeping operations and set a dangerous precedent for the peacekeeping system, but they can they can also create risks to international peace and security.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the questions that the Security Council received from the membership in response to Ukraine's initiative to hold the wrap-up session. My response will not cover all of the questions, but I will attempt to comment on several of them in connection with the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency Group with regard to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. I do not recall the code as having been invoked as an instrument for addressing specific situations. What I can affirm is that those of us who signed that code must act in concert and in a spirit of shared responsibility to prevent and combat such serious crimes from occurring.

In the case of South Sudan, the Council is seeking to achieve results, but as we know, in some respects it is united and in another it is not. An example of that was the draft resolution of an arms embargo on South Sudan in December that could not be adopted and that Uruguay, moreover, supported.

In response to a question that was asked by a non-member of the Security Council concerning working methods, I reiterate the idea that the briefing-consultations format provides us all — members and non-members of the Security Council — with the opportunity to achieve greater transparency through using the meeting to read out statements made in a national capacity publicly and to save consultations for more sensitive issues within a more interactive dynamic.

However, with regard to consultations and the agenda item of "Any other business", I would like to mention the issue of documentation. It is crucial to have as much information as possible from the Secretariat during those closed meetings, including illustrative documents, such as detailed maps, when we discuss the situation in a particular region.

It is also necessary for the members of the Council to be able to obtain from the Secretariat the required documentation before those meetings so that members

can fully acquaint themselves with the issues at and make the appropriate decisions. It therefore is totally unacceptable for the Secretariat to deny access to documentation that is indispensable for Council members to be able to take a position and the necessary actions in order to fulfil their commitments. That is an extremely delicate issue, and in my view needs to be carefully considered by the Council.

Mr. Zhang Dianbin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the convening of this meeting by Ukraine and appreciates that country's leadership as President of the Security Council in guiding the Council's work for the month February. We once again convey to the delegation of the Russian Federation our condolences on and sadness felt over the passing of Ambassador Churkin.

With regard to this month's work, I would like to focus on the following three issues.

The first concerns the situation in Europe. This month, the Council held a ministerial meeting on conflicts in Europe (see S/PV.7886) and held briefings on the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the question of Kosovo. Recent years have witnessed general stability in Europe and progress on some hotspot issues. But complicated and uncertain factors remain, and conventional and unconventional challenges are increasing. All that calls for the concerted and united efforts of countries in addressing them. China hopes that the European countries will establish a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation, enhance their cooperation with each other and remain committed to the peaceful resolution of their differences and to comprehensive, just and lasting solutions to issues.

The second issue concerns the prevention of conflicts. Peace has been the common aspiration and lofty goal of humankind. China stands for resolutely defending the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and for establishing a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation and developing a shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security vision. The roles of the United Nations and the Council in stopping war and peacekeeping should be fully utilized. We must address the underlying causes of conflicts for the sake of development. We should also scale up efforts for preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding. We must remain committed to solving differences through political means.

The third issue concerns combating terrorism. This month, the Council held an open debate on the protection of critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks (see S/PV.7882). At a time when the fight against terrorism is facing increasing challenges, infrastructure has become an easier target for terrorist attacks. The international community should pay great attention to that and be united in its efforts. Terrorism is the common enemy of humankind, and China advocates a unified criterion in our fight against terrorism in which we fully leverage the leading role of the United Nations and the Council, while abiding by the purposes and principles of the Charter and enhancing coordination and scaling up cooperation in the fight against terrorism so as to jointly maintain world peace and security.

In conclusion, I wish the United Kingdom all the best in its Presidency for the month of March.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, personally, as well as your delegation, for your leadership of the Security Council the month of February.

As we take stock of the Council's work for February, it has not been a simple straightforward month. There have been some very positive developments, but there have also been some very bitter moments, such as the regrettable passing of Ambassador Vitaly Churkin. In that regard, I would like to take this opportunity once again to express our deepest condolences to Ambassador Churkin's family, the Mission of the Russian Federation and the Government and the people of Russia on the loss of one of their most brilliant ambassadors. Ambassador Churkin not only worked diligently to defend his country's interests, but he also worked in the context of very complicated negotiations so that political dialogue might prevail. That is the case of the ceasefire agreement in Syria, which we hope will be accompanied by a political agreement that would be the result of ongoing talks within the framework of United Nations efforts.

On another note, one of the most significant positive efforts from this month that we wish to point out is the fact that the Security Council was able to reach unanimous agreement on several fronts. That was the case with the adoption of resolution 2340 (2017) on South Sudan, resolution 2341 (2017) on the protection of critical infrastructure, resolution 2342

(2017) on the situation in Yemen, and resolution 2343 (2017) on the situation in Guinea-Bissau, which, I repeat, were adopted unanimously by the Council, and which were the result of dialogue and negotiation. Everyone contributes to the negotiation of resolutions in the General Assembly, adding to the text of such resolutions. I believe that logic was applied here in the cases I mentioned.

With respect to the issues raised by some Member States here today, I wish to point out and join in the proposal of one those Missions that open debates be compiled and summarized with a view to having a record of State participation in open debates convened by the Security Council. That would increase the transparency of its work.

Other Member States have referred to the prerogative of the Secretary-General to appoint Secretariat officials. We agree that no State can undermine that prerogative and power of the Secretary-General. However, at the same time, we call attention to the declaration of Heads of State and Government of the Group of 77 and China, which represents, as I believe everyone knows, two-thirds of the membership of the Organization. In that statement, the Group called for continued efforts to revitalize the General Assembly, to reform the Security Council, increasing — among other things — the amount of representation of developing countries, in particular in higher categories, and to improve geographical representation in the Secretariat. In that regard, all divisions that promote the increased participation of members should be encouraged by the Council and by the entire Organization in general.

In addition, I would like to highlight the leadership of Japan in the transformation and reform of our working methods. As a relatively new member of the Council, we have benefited from a variety of decisions that have allowed us to plan our participation in the Council's work ahead of time.

We join the representative of Uruguay in voicing concern over the lack of transparency of the Secretariat. In several instances, access to some documentation was not allowed. Ensuring that all information is available to all members of the Council is essential to our ability, as equal members, to make decisions.

Mr. Hickey (United Kingdom): I will remember February 2017 as the month in which my friend and colleague, Vitaly Churkin, passed away. I wish to once again pass on my condolences to the Russian team and to his family.

February was also a month in which Ukraine did an excellent job presiding over the Security Council, and I want to commend you, Mr. President, and your team, for the way in which you did that. I think a number of the working methods that you instigated should be continued. For example, your efforts to ensure the transparency of our work have been very effective. And, in response to the question posed by the representative of France, your involvement of civil society has been noteworthy, and something that the United Kingdom will continue next month. You have also made sure that we were focused on action and that, in particular, some sort of action came of our conversations in the closed consultations room, whether that was a bilateral meeting between you and the Permanent Representative of a country that we had been discussing, press elements or press statements. Very clearly, pursuing an action-oriented approach is something the United Kingdom would like to follow as well. Moreover, I think you did a good job of bringing difficult and at times divisive issues to our attention, including the conflicts in Europe, from which your country is suffering most particularly. The manner in which you did that was highly effective, and I congratulate you and your team.

In addition to our working methods, I would also like to say a few words about what we do and the content of our work, and to look both backward to February and forward to the British presidency in March. The overarching theme for next month will be preventing conflicts in Africa. That is something on which the incoming Secretary-General has placed significant focus. I strongly agree with him that prevention is better than the cure, and that investing upstream before things worsen is a good thing to do in terms of time, energy, effort and resources, all in the pursuit of saving lives and preventing threats to international peace and security from spiralling out of control. We have already had both good and bad examples of that in 2017.

The Gambia provides a good example from January, wherein the United Nations, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States all came together in a highly effective way to prevent a conflict there. On the other hand, in February we have heard that the situation in South Sudan has got even worse and that, on top of the political complexity of that country and the risk of genocide, there is now a certified famine — only the second famine anywhere

in the world to have been declared since the year 2000. One hundred thousand people are starving in South Sudan, and 1 million are on the brink of famine. So, building on the work of this month, I think we need to do even more next month to ensure the Security Council is doing its utmost to support the efforts of the Secretary-General to bring peace to South Sudan. We will be holding a high-level briefing on that issue on 23 March.

In February, we have also heard about the worrying scale of violence against civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is another example of an area where preventing things from getting worse should absolutely be at the top of the Council's list of priorities. In that regard, it is vital that those who are responsible for such violence be held accountable for it, and that we see progress in the political process. We look forward to considering those issues further during the British presidency.

In all of these issues related to the continent of Africa, cooperation with the African Union and subregional bodies will be absolutely crucial. As I said, that was one of the things that made the Gambian example a positive one, and it is one of the things that we are seeking to do in South Sudan.

I would also like to mention Somalia. In March the United Kingdom will be hearing from representatives of both the United Nations and the African Union about progress in that country. And, of course, tomorrow night, we will be setting off on a visit to the Lake Chad Basin to have a look at four countries: Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria, where there are a whole set of factors — political, security, governance, terrorism, environmental and surely many others — that we need to re-examine, working in concert with our colleagues from the African Union. I hope that gives an idea of some of the highlights — both of this month and next month — in terms of how we have been working closely together.

There is one final part of the British presidency in March that I wanted to mention — the open debate to be held here on 14 March on modern slavery. That speaks to the point made by our Chinese colleague on understanding the root causes, getting underneath the skin of issues, and trying to find the link between development issues and security issues. The scourge of modern slavery is a good example of an issue that touches on a very wide range of other issues of concern to the Security Council, and is absolutely a threat to international peace and security.

I would like to thank everyone for the good wishes for next month. I look forward to working with everyone and carrying on Mr. Yelchenko's highly effective working methods.

Mr. Vaverka (Sweden): I would like to start by joining other Council members in paying tribute to you, Mr. President, and to your team for your excellent stewardship of the Council during the month of February. The Council's most important task is to address threats to international peace and security in an effective way, and we therefore welcome the presidency's commitment to continuing our efforts to make the work of the Council more result-oriented, transparent and inclusive. Your innovation for today's wrap-up meeting, providing the wider membership with an opportunity to pose questions to the Council, is another step in that direction.

The Council members who have spoken before me have comprehensively addressed the important issues that have been on the Council's agenda this month, and I do not wish to expand or elaborate a great deal further on them, other than highlighting a few points without going into too much detail. We had a constructive discussion of the situation in the Middle East; we have focused a lot of attention on the security situation in Europe, which is, of course, of significant importance to Sweden; and we have looked at a number of issues in Africa and Asia. We have challenges ahead of us, and rather than repeating what has been eloquently discussed by other Council members, I will cut my statement a little short and perhaps address a few of the questions that have been raised by the wider membership, which has seized the opportunity presented by the Ukrainian presidency to give the Council some food for thought.

First, with regard to the issue of working methods, for the elected members the work done by the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, including presidential note S/2010/507, is key. Those notes provide useful guidance while retaining the degree of flexibility that the Council needs. We heard Ambassador Bessho of Japan describe the agenda of the Informal Working Group for this year, and I would like to say that we wholeheartedly support those efforts. In fact, many of the ideas needed to make the Council more effective are already there. Individual Council members should make use of them,

and the presidency has a special responsibility for putting them into practice. The Ukrainian presidency has demonstrated that in an excellent way.

To be truly successful, however, the support of all Council members is required, and we are pleased to note that the beginning of this year has seen us coming together behind those efforts. In that regard, two points stand out. First, as some of my colleagues on the Council have mentioned, the greater use of agreed-on press elements after consultations is not only a way to increase transparency but also helps the Council to summarize the salient points of discussions and think about how best to address the issues further. Secondly, the inclusion of relevant representatives of regional organizations and civil society as briefers has brought a field and regional perspective that has improved the Council's understanding of the full picture and thereby enriched the quality of its deliberations and decisions. I think we have seen that on several occasions this month as well.

That brings me to the issue of prevention, which was also raised by a Member State in the questions posed to the Council. Prevention is at the heart of the new sustaining peace agenda. The need for a strengthened relationship on prevention between the Security Council and the Secretary-Generai was one of the key messages that emerged from the open debate on 10 January on conflict prevention and sustaining peace (see S/PV.7857). In February, Ukraine has ensured that this strengthened relationship has come to life. Council members greatly appreciated the Secretary-General's interactive briefing of the Council on his return from the African Union Summit, during which he touched on several initiatives being taken to reinvigorate processes aimed at preventing relapses into conflict. That kind of interaction should continue, and I think that with a concerted effort between us — the Council — and the Secretary-General, we will be able to do that in a meaningful way.

To address a question raised about the subsidiary organs, I would like to mention that as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict established pursuant to resolution 1612 (2005), I was pleased that the Working Group has already adopted speedy conclusions on the situation of children and armed conflict in Colombia, the first negotiated under our chairship. We will next focus on negotiating conclusions on children and armed conflict in Somalia.

In conclusion, I would like to respond to a question on the perceptions so far of the 10 newly elected non-permanent Security Council members and their short-term priorities. After two months on the Council, our overall perception is that at the moment there is positive momentum within it. The relationship between the Secretary-General and the Council is becoming stronger, and there is a commitment on both sides to working constructively together, with a renewed focus on prevention and sustaining peace. While there were some differing views, I believe that the idea of focusing on how we can prevent conflict — addressing root causes and looking at sustainable development, human rights, humanitarian challenges and issues of peace and security together — is increasingly becoming part of the Council's conversation. Encouraging that approach, including by engaging in dialogue with all Council members, is both a short-term and long-term priority for Sweden. We look forward to supporting and working closely with our colleagues from the United Kingdom as we continue those conversations in March. The Council trip to the Lake Chad basin region starting tomorrow will enable us to put that perspective into practice.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Ukraine.

Last year the Council organized meetings on the implementation of presidential note S/2010/507 just five times, and today is the first time this year that we have held a meeting on the subject. I believe that we should not judge the interest in the subject by those numbers, since all of us are aware of the acute interest in the Council's work on the part of the United Nations general membership, which is very much apparent in the corridors adjacent to this Chamber. We therefore see real added value in endeavouring to improve the format of the preparations for such meetings if we are to make our deliberations more efficient and relevant. In that spirit, the presidency has sought the input of Member States to shape today's discussion. We leave it up to future presidencies to continue and build on the practice.

Despite the fact that February is the shortest month of the year, it has been densely packed with meetings and discussions, both in the Council and in its subsidiary bodies. One of the highlights of our work this month was the initiative that the Secretary-General took to brief us on his participation in the African Union Summit. Without going into the details of the

briefing, which was very informative and useful, we believe that holding such meetings on a regular basis would immensely strengthen the relationship between the Council and the Secretary-General and thereby benefit the whole United Nations family. We are also looking forward to seeing the Secretary-General continue to play a more proactive role in bringing important issues of peace and security to the Security Council's attention.

On 13 February, the Security Council held an open debate (see S/PV.7882) on how we, as the international community, should provide a fitting response to the threat of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure. We hope that resolution 2341 (2017), adopted at that meeting, will helpt to increase the effectiveness of States' efforts in that area, and in particular in the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The subsequent discussion clearly reflected demands from Member States for significant improvements in the protection of critical infrastructure — especially aviation and maritime transportation, the nuclear industry, the finance sector and cross-border projects — from terrorist threats both physical and cyber. The question now is how thoroughly we can all implement the resolution and what further steps should be taken at the national, regional and international levels. I take this opportunity to inform the United Nations community that my country has already started the process of implementing the resolution through respective decisions of the President and the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine from 16 February.

On 21 February, the Council engaged in another open debate (see S/PV.7886) on the subject of conflicts in Europe. While it is quite obvious that, at the moment, it is rather hard to expect unity on the subject, a very real deterioration of the security situation on the European continent, with far-reaching repercussions for global stability and security demands the most urgent attention. We cannot afford to carry on in blissful ignorance, hoping that somehow the problems in question will simply disappear; they will not. Unless diligently and properly addressed, they will continue to fester and poison relations among States, further endangering international peace and security.

Responding to inquiries from our colleagues outside the Council on the work of the subsidiary bodies, I will say a few words in the capacity of the Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. In leading said Committees, I always strive to increase efficiency and transparency of their work, maintain constructive engagement with the Governments of countries concerned through their Permanent Missions here in New York, facilitate the work of their respective Panels of Experts and keep communication channels open with all interested parties. One of my most immediate plans at this point is to conduct a visit to Darfur to have discussions with Sudanese authorities and United Nations entities on how to further improve the Committee's work.

Following respective requests by a number of Member States, allow me to make several comments regarding the working methods of the Security Council in February. Like many others, Ukraine is quite concerned that despite the commitment to making greater use of open meetings, there is a marked increase in the number of informal consultations that the Council holds. From the very beginning of preparing the programme of work for February, my delegation strived to plan most of the briefings in open Chamber. While in the end, it was not possible to change established practice, we are grateful to Council members for their general support for such an approach and we hope that in the future, the format of consultations will gradually become less of a rule and give way to open meetings.

As one of my colleagues pointed out during one of the consultations, abstaining from communicating States' positions in public statements in the Chamber on any given subject can send the wrong signal to parties concerned. Sometimes, that kind of silence from the Council can be misinterpreted, resulting in unintended consequences. The Council has to find a balance between the confidentiality of informal consultations and the need to maintain a maximum degree of openness. Therefore, in line with President's note S/2015/507, we encourage future presidencies to continue briefing the media and the public after informal consultations with short summaries. We have tried to do so throughout the month and we would like to encourage those following us to further perfect that practice.

In preparation for Council's country-specific deliberations in February, I held meetings of the presidency with parties concerned before the Council's meetings or consultations. We consider it very important for the presidency to hear their views,

concerns, ideas, requests or expectations, as such advanced knowledge would contribute to shaping the Council's discussions accordingly.

In conclusion, I thank Council members for their kind words addressed to my team and me. If we were successful in presiding over the Council, it is because we enjoyed its cooperation and had its support. To my friend Ambassador Matthew Rycroft, as well as the delegation of the United Kingdom, who will be moving into this seat of responsibility in a few hours, I would like to convey a message of our unequivocal and full support.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.